

Edited by  
Bryan W. Schmidt  
and Weston Twardowski

# Staging Visitation

Tourist Performances  
and Theatricalized Places



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and Theatricalized Places*

Bryan W. Schmidt  
and Weston Twardowski, Editors

University of Michigan Press  
Ann Arbor

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Published in the United States of America by the  
University of Michigan Press  
First published August 2026

A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data has been applied for.*

ISBN 978-0-472-07815-8 (hardcover : alk. paper)

ISBN 978-0-472-05815-0 (paper : alk. paper)

ISBN 978-0-472-90594-2 (open access ebook)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.12863389>

The University of Michigan Press's broader open access publishing program is made possible thanks to additional funding from the University of Michigan Office of the Provost and the generous support of contributing libraries.

Cover image credit: [iStock.com/Ilija Erceg](https://www.iStock.com/IlijaErceg). Stock photo ID:1364457396.

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Digital materials related to this title can be found on the Fulcrum platform via the following citable URL: <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.12863389>

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# Introduction

Bryan Schmidt and Weston Twardowski

In a globalized world predicated on seamless connectivity, to travel, to visit other places, is fundamental to how we understand our communities and ourselves. Whether escaping to the beach for vacation, seeing loved ones who dwell on the opposite side of the country or across borders, embarking on an enriching culture binge in a storied city, or squeezing in some sight-seeing during a business trip, these spatial breaks from our daily routines often become defining life experiences. They get preserved as memories and staged as photographs, which accrue in albums, circulate over social media, and calcify as repositories of first-person knowledge about a broad world. The unique hustle of travel acts as something of a quickening, heightening the senses to actively take in sights, sounds, smells, and other affective dimensions that operate as mere background noise in our quotidian lives. Visiting a new place means pushing oneself, either by means of packing the itinerary to tear through a region's attractions in mere days (or even "36 hours" as the travel guide adage goes) or by stepping out of your comfort zone to meet with new people, explore regional heritage, and "try on" foreign customs. Visits become the subjects of stories we tell, the basis for our opinions on global issues, the big events we look forward to and use to find structure within a year or a lifetime.

These aspirational dimensions of travel often become flattened when located within the grammar of tourism. It is easy, even reflexive, to reduce tourism to a transactional, consumerist practice, one that naturalizes an oppositional model of the traveler as a perpetually antagonistic outsider, whose journey always already denotes a shallow, even harmful form of external interference with the destination's people and environment. One can even use the label "tourist" as an insult that has nothing to do with travel at all, as with terms like cultural tourist, political tourist, etc. Tourism's bad rap is not

wholly unearned, of course. Even quickly skimming recent headlines reveals the breadth of realms across which the travel industry's harm is spread: from the overuse of civic resources ("Record Tourist Numbers Are Clogging Up Kyoto's Public Transport"), to environmental degradation ("Mount Everest is Turning Into a Garbage Dump"), to a general sense of social destruction ("How My Beloved Italian City Has Turned into Tourist Hell").<sup>1</sup>

But as significant as the problems associated with tourism are, cynical approaches to travel—even when that travel nominally exists as a product of consumer capitalism—belie the practice's complexity, its importance to self-definition, the economic realities that tether local communities to the travel industry, and the central place that freedom of movement holds within liberal values and notions of citizenship. Sociologists like Dean MacCannell have long established that an analysis of tourism reveals fundamental truths about the nature of modern life: the secularization of culture, the search for authenticity within a social context predicated on commodification, and the entanglement of individual and community identities with global consciousness.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, scholars from fields like anthropology, cultural studies, and geography have recognized that tourism offers a way of approaching such ideas with ethnographic precision and attentiveness to theatrical modalities that frame travel experiences.<sup>3</sup> From theater and performance studies, scholars like Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Susan Bennett, and Jane Desmond have demonstrated how individuals and communities work to stage heritage and create meaning through performed encounters as means of garnering visitors and the economic benefits they represent.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, every year for the last decade or so, the American Society for Theatre Research (ASTR) has convened a variously named working session on "Tourism," which has steadily built a cohesive approach to travel as a complex scenario encompassing people, place, and narrative, where historical contexts and contemporary demands intertwine to create curated experiences for visitors through the labor of host communities.<sup>5</sup> As scholars of performance, we are particularly interested in how these embodied (and, increasingly, virtual) interactions shape both destinations and the travelers who temporarily inhabit them.

## Toward Visitation

It is somewhat customary for those who study tourism to note the reflexive understanding of tourism as a "bad object"; it almost goes without saying

that critical discourse regards tourism as an infelicitous and likely destructive force foisted upon host communities through coercive structures like modernity, capitalism, and globalization. Yet, the embrace of tourism as a critical facet of the world economy since the 1980s, particularly in developing countries, challenges simplistic narratives of tourism as a facet of domination. It is true that the turn to tourism as an economic lifeline was often compelled by pervasive neoliberal logics and structural adjustment schemes devised by supranational bodies like the IMF, World Bank, and UNESCO. But it is also true that within the global economic order's constraints, marginalized communities have embraced tourism as a platform for preserving culture, building sustainable economic opportunity, environmental caretaking, promoting indigenous heritage and knowledge, and grassroots activism—these should not be invisibilized, even to call attention to their deleterious outcomes. As Margaret Werry points out in her recent survey *Theatre & Tourism*: “Tourism is so diverse, so ubiquitous, so entwined with other services, products, and forms of mobility that it makes little sense to call it ‘an’ industry. It is, instead, a pervasive social fact.”<sup>6</sup> Not only is tourism a ubiquitous facet of contemporary life and politics, it is also a deeply ingrained logic of what it means to extend one's horizons, a naturalized methodology for growth and social exploration, a mode of personal extension that mirrors the empathic and experiential dimensions of performance itself.

For these reasons we approach tourism through the lens of “Visitation,” a term that centers its participatory dimensions and retains its sense of tense copresence between insiders (hosts) and outsiders (visitors). This framing avoids a cynical approach that privileges either party in its analysis, while also recognizing the different roles people play during travel. Understanding tourism through the lens of visitation foregrounds the temporal (temporary) nature of travel as a participatory practice; it understands the frame of travel as a distinct event nominally separated from the visitor's quotidian life, while also recognizing that the scenario of travel may *be* quotidian life for host communities. A visit may be fortuitous, eye-opening, a source of connection, just as it can also be stressful, draining, and exploitative of a host's hospitality. A fortuitous visitation involves a great deal of labor from both hosts and visitors. Preparations must be made on personal, civic, and even national levels: long-term construction of infrastructure involves major social investment; decisions get made about how to stage one's home(town) to communicate desired values to outsiders, and teach them how to properly engage with the place; hosts must consider how to be flexible to the desires of outsiders, while

also retaining and communicating their core values. Likewise, travelers must invest a good deal of time, money, and energy moving outside of familiar settings. They work to acquire local knowledge and bring focused attention to a new place, and they act as marketers, intermediaries, and even amateur anthropologists when they communicate their findings upon returning home. Travelers must also prepare themselves to confront uncomfortable truths about the nature of the world and their own positionality in the global order. These profound considerations lurk beneath the surface of tourism's stereotypical interactions: the broad smiles of happy hosts; the awkward anxiety of being greeted by an unfamiliar food or an image of local poverty; the dismissive "tourist gaze" that can only take in a slim dimension of a complex place.

Tourism is a reciprocal act of performance: visitors are shaped by the places they encounter, just as destinations are transformed by the needs and expectations of those who arrive. What we call *tourist performances* bring attention to the repertoires that guide how people travel and host—the embodied style of taking in new places or staging home, the modes of constructing narratives about one's trips or shaping the transmission of local history, the material exchanges (for better and worse) created at destination sites. Travelers may imagine themselves as more cosmopolitan, better connected to heritage, or more ethically engaged depending on the framing they bring to their experiences. At the same time, destinations respond by staging themselves for consumption. From the highly choreographed environments of theme parks to underfunded heritage sites where staff apologize for deteriorating conditions, travel destinations become *theatricalized places* that get managed and performed to meet visitor expectations. Local workers often inhabit prescribed roles to deliver a curated experience of their own lives at home, underscoring tourism as an ongoing process of mutual construction in which visitors, hosts, and destinations are immanently remade by the journey.

Theater and performance studies are especially well-positioned to approach this tension between the live corporeal dimensions of tourism and the layers of history, text, and ideology that script how a visitation gets planned and acquires social meaning. As the case studies in this volume demonstrate, the drivers of visitation are multivariate—nearly anything, properly staged for the right audience, can be made a travel site. This volume builds from the recognition that the power dynamics, economic imperatives, and affective structures of visitation are not new to theater and performance studies, but have at this moment found new urgency. As innovative and increasingly mediated forms of travel become central to the everyday functioning of an

interconnected global society, we argue that theater and performance can shed new light on how visitation transforms places and cultures. The immersivity of travel creates corporeally and affectively rich experiences that the disciplines of theater and performance studies (with their unique attentiveness to the intersection of embodied spatial practice, narrative, and social choreography) are uniquely well-positioned to capture.

## Sections and Organization

Our organization for this volume uses the framework of “staging” to think through various axes of visitation. This builds from the growing recognition that the theatricalization of place is fundamentally intertwined with the global tourism economy.<sup>7</sup> Calling attention to the way that visitations are staged forces us to recognize the representational practices at work in everyday travel scenarios premised on immediacy and authenticity.

Such staging is fairly obvious when discussing constructed destinations like theme parks or “tourist traps,” which entice travel through the production of spectacle that elevate places into Disneyfied commodities. But staging also takes place in more coded or subtle ways during visits; for example, the promotional materials and virtual scripts that condition travelers to encounter places from a specific vantage point. Visitation today is always mediated by a complex of inspirational and logistical agents—though they do not always recognize themselves as such. Just as the travelogues and postcards of the past abstracted the complexity of a destination to become legible to would-be travelers, today people are drawn to the targeted consumption of a place through a vast array of published travel guides, YouTube channels and influencers, and even AI-powered personal assistants.

Tourism can be thought of as a form of autoethnography, with travel often premised on self-discovery, learning about others, and forming transnational connections. In this way, visitors erect frameworks and scripts by which they understand themselves and their hosts as characters in a larger story. Tourism becomes a way to make sense of a multivocal and polysemic world—if this threatens to flatten out the complexity of travel destinations, it also provides the opportunity to focus attention, build memories, and provoke empathy. Thus, our attention to staging in tourist experiences recalls the theater’s historical function as a “seeing place,” a representational frame that is not real but not-not real.

We begin each section of essays with an introduction by a leading scholar who has made significant contributions working at the intersection of performance and tourism. These short glosses function to focus our attention on certain theoretical dimensions of each section's mode of staging, and to cohere the section's chapters (varied in their geographical and methodological approaches) around key questions:

Joseph Roach (Section 1) locates the tourism phenomena within a vortex of history, demonstrating that only careful attentiveness to transformations in repertoire reveals the larger power relations in which they are enmeshed. This point is further detailed by Margaret Werry (Section 2), whose attention to corporeality, motility, and immanence in her analysis of the performances—some consciously staged, and some in which theatricality operates in a more coded manner (e.g., tour guides)—models how theater and performance studies are uniquely positioned to contribute to a field that has become key to not only GDP, but also to defining heritage and culture. Susan Bennett (Section 3) notes the irony with which scholars and critics dismiss entertainment while overlooking their own tacit celebration of cultural tourism. Her keen analysis of urban development alongside theatrical criticism (aimed at commercial ventures) is echoed throughout this volume, as is her contention that cultural products and experiences produced at the local level are often fundamentally enmeshed with a globalized event economy. Finally, Mary Louise Pratt (Section 4), in examining the planetary dimensions of tourist encounters, explores the ways in which visitation opens the possibility of creating better futures across time and space through the mutual exchange visitation enables.

The first section of this book, "Staging Identity: Self-Making through Visitation," looks at how tourists use travel experiences to recover or reconstruct their sense of self. It asks what motivates people to travel transnationally, exploring the varied ethical drives that compel tourism. Here we see stories of travelers (including the authors themselves) *absorbed* in place, using visitation to better understand their own history, further their ideals, and stoke their critical faculties. In Chapter 1, Mechele Leon leads us through her autoethnographic exploration of Jewish cultural heritage along Spain's Sephardic Way. Bryan Schmidt's explication of an eco-themed Costa Rican music festival in Chapter 2 considers how partying millennials come to see their international travel as a moral imperative, a pathway to progressive personal transformation through immersion in another culture. In Chapter 3 Henry Castillo focuses on how racial attitudes circulate globally through

an examination of traditional women fruit vendors in Cartagena, Colombia, whose images get iconized and mass produced as statuettes for tourist consumption.

The second section, “Staged Visits: Making Places Perform,” focuses on how visitation gets defined by theatrical framings and technologies of visibility. Iconic, spectacle-driven curations of place are, of course, foundational technologies of the tourism industry that range from the Sleeping Beauty Castle of Disneyland to the Burj Khalifa that dominates the Dubai skyline. Such attractions create striking initial impressions that profoundly impact the way travelers immerse themselves in the mythos of a location. As a collection, these essays model the interlocking scales at which a visitation’s theatrical framing takes place, from the individual to the community to the nation. The ideological dimension of such architectural conditioning gets explored in Chapter 4 through Joanna Dee Das’s explication of the Silver Dollar City theme park in Branson, Missouri, and its recreation of a nineteenth-century American frontier town for family audiences. In Chapter 5, Susan Tennerello demonstrates how spectacle gets disseminated on a global scale through mass media technologies by examining how Olympics opening ceremonies function as live, tourism-generating attractions that globally broadcast singular imaginations of national culture and carry significant financial stakes for host cities. In Chapter 6, Gretchen Smith brings our attention to how the theatrical framing of place occurs at the level of the individual gaze by taking us through her careful prompting as a pedagogue leading groups of students on trips to London’s historic Brick Lane and Globe Theatre.

In Section Three, “Virtual Stages: Immersive Imagination,” we bring attention to forms of travel that trouble the facet of liveness (the sense of *being there*) that appears nominally foundational to the concept of visitation. Mediated forms of interfacing with new places have, of course, always been a foundational dimension of tourism. We might think back to the travelogues and early forms of souvenirs that accompanied the Grand Tours of European nobility beginning in the sixteenth century—the paintings, jewelry, carved models, and even natural specimens that attested to other spaces and told stories of other cultures. Such treasures were foundational to constructing broader imaginaries of different places in the world, appearing as virtual forms of travel. Today, virtuality remains central to tourism, with web technologies and social media intersecting with every facet of visitation: influencers drive public trends in particular sites and activities; publishing selfies, Instagram stories, TikToks, or travel Vlogs form a crucial parallel dimension to the trip’s

main attractions; and thanks to web reviews, travelers often know exactly what restaurants they will go to and what they will order before departing.

The chapters in this section span both old and new forms of virtuality. In Chapter 7 Janine Sun Rogers uses a star-studded web promotional campaign for a World War II video game and virtual reality simulations of the Pearl Harbor bombing to interrogate the role of militourism in the South Pacific. In Chapter 8, Youjeong Oh examines a YouTube content phenomenon of one-month living on Jeju Island, a popular domestic travel destination for South Koreans seeking an escape from the intense daily pressure of hypercompetitive corporate culture. In Chapter 9, Humberto Garcia addresses historical means by which people visited other nations, the letters, poetry, and photographs that constituted early forms of virtual travel. Focusing on records left by Abu Talib Khan during his time as a tourist to London's Paradisial Gardens in the eighteenth century, he outlines how such travel was key to globalizing British conceptions of race and gender.

Section 4, "All the World's a Stage: Planetary Visitations," brings attention to environmental, geologic, and archaeologic actors common to many travel experiences, but often overlooked in anthropocentric analytical methodologies. The subjects of these chapters—animals, deserts, and dinosaurs—carry considerable phenomenological weight as compelling spectacles of travel. They inspire awe, locate contemporary places within transhistorical scales, and build a form of global consciousness by directing our gaze to the natural conditions of travel. As the scholars in this section show, such objects of planetary significance are also crucial to the social organization of tourism. They are the attractions around which travel industries get organized, the symbolic wellsprings taken up in regional promotional campaigns, the bedrock that dislocates us from quotidian modern life. In Chapter 10 Megan Lewis examines the zoological and the sociological in relation to safari culture in Southern Africa. In Chapter 11 Scott Magelssen similarly considers the symbolic resonance of creatures—dinosaurs—that play on settler colonial fantasies of encounter. He argues that attempts to reanimate dinosaurs in both filmic representations (e.g., *Jurassic Park*) as well as tourist attractions (Dinosaur Park in Rapid City, South Dakota), play on tropes of white precarity in US frontier spaces, and characterize Indigenous people as "threatening" parts of the natural landscape. And in Chapter 12, Weston Twardowski considers the role of the desert in creative performances of Black futurity in Marfa, Texas by the artists Lisa E. Harris and Alisha B. Wormsley, whose experimental performances utilize terrain as a means of challenging traditional economies of tourism as a gesture of freedom and futurity.

The essays included in this volume represent an array of times, locations, scales, methodologies, scholarly disciplines, and critical questions. However, we were gratified to see many ideas resonate across various papers, with authors frequently citing one another's work, and collaboratively developing this concept of visitation through multiple vantage points. Visitation opened our thinking to the imaginative and the personal, shifting our frame of reference to the myriad ways that travel defines our values, relationships, interests, and dreams. Taken in this context, tourism becomes not only an activity, but a tactic of political economy, of identity formation, of placemaking and collective performance, of mutual exchange, of learning. It speaks fundamentally to how we want to (and sometimes must) introduce ourselves to others, and to the surprising ways we can resist being narrowly defined by our own appropriation of place and heritage.

## Notes

1. Sajina Limbu, "Amidst Growing Mountain Tourism in Nepal, Mount Everest Confronts the Perils of Pollution," *Earth.org*, April 24, 2024, <https://earth.org/amidst-growing-mountain-tourism-in-nepal-mount-everest-confronts-the-perils-of-pollution/>; Mia Glass, *Bloomberg*, April 24, 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-04-24/japan-record-tourist-numbers-are-clogging-up-kyoto-s-public-transport>; Ilaria Maria Sala, *New York Times*, August 9, 2024.

2. Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, 3rd Edition (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

3. Tim Edensor, *Tourists at the Taj: Performance and Meaning at a Symbolic Site* (London: Routledge, 1998); John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze*, 3rd Edition (London: SAGE Publications, 2011).

4. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Jane Desmond, *Staging Tourism: Bodies on Display from Waikiki to Sea World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Susan Bennett, "Theatre/Tourism," *Theatre Journal*, 57, no. 3 (October 2005): 407–428.

5. We convened this working session from 2019–2023. We would like to acknowledge the labor of Tom Robson and Jenny Kokai, who led the working session before us, as well as Heather Grimm and Chelsea Taylor for continuing this work at the 2025 ASTR Conference.

6. Margaret Werry, *Theatre and Tourism* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2023), 7.

7. Susan Bennett, "Universal Experience: The City as Tourist Stage," in *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, edited by Tracy C. Davis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 76–90; Emma Willis, *Theatricality, Dark Tourism and Ethical Spectatorship: Absent Others* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); David Picard and Mike Robinson, eds., *Festivals, Tourism and Social Change: Remaking Worlds* (Bristol, UK: Channel View Publications, 2006); Tim Edensor, *Tourists at the Taj*, 1998.



SECTION ONE

Staging Identity

*Self-Making through Visitation*



## Section 1 Introduction

Joseph Roach

In Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, the traveler Marco Polo enthralls the emperor Kublai Khan with an account of his many visitations.<sup>1</sup> He reports on every stop along his tour of fifty-five fantastical destinations stretching to the farthest reaches of the Khan's realm. Each tantalizing description evokes an imperial city that the aging despot will never see: his empire is too vast; his rule, too corrupted; his melancholy, too deep. Yet he would know of them all vicariously, and Polo, one of the most famous visitors (and fabulists) of all time, eloquently obliges him.

By way of introduction to "Staging Identity," let highlights from Calvino's traveler's invisible cities tour suggest a heuristic itinerary, beginning with the provocation that all the cities on his tour bear the names of women. As in the ethical asymmetry of the gendered gaze, the visitor beholds, whereas the destination is beheld. But on the authority of Calvino's title, these cities remain unseen, so no matter how real they may be, they still must be imagined. There is Octavia, for example, the spider-web city, which hangs suspended in the air by filaments woven into a shimmering net, and Chloe, a great but wholly silent city, where all of the inhabitants remain complete strangers, passing one another on the street unrecognized and mutually disregarding. Eutropia consists of a magnificent ensemble of many high-towered cities, only one of which at a time may be inhabited. Zobeide came into being one night when all the men dreamt the same dream of a long-haired woman running naked through moonlit streets, so they built the pure white city that waits to welcome her, even though she never appears. And so forth.

As Marco Polo's fabulous tour continues, however, doubts arise. The emperor begins to suspect that few or none of these cities exist in his empire or anywhere else. The reader begins to suspect that all these different reports may represent different ways of describing only one city: the narrator's native

Venice. Are we really just taking fifty-five imaginary tours of the same destination? This most evocative of suspicions, redolent as it is of estrangement, nostalgia, and the doomed quest for authenticity, offers a clue to the general experience of visitation: by making the strange seem more familiar in order to make the familiar feel more strange, our destinations reflect back to us the place we are coming from so that we can better explain who we are.

The three essays in this section—Mechele Leon’s “By Means of Visitation: Tourism and Identity on Spain’s Sephardic Way,” Bryan Schmidt’s “Manufacturing ‘The *Pura Vida* Effect’: Costa Rica’s Envision Festival, Pure Life, and the Contradictions of Conscious Tourism,” and Henry Castillo’s “The Black Flowers of the Walled City: Tourism and the Embodiment of National Heritage in Cartagena”—share Spanish-speaking locales, Iberian or Latin American. Although they differ in geography, race, and ethnicity, these far-flung destinations also trace their modern history to the same two-fold calamity. As Christopher Columbus famously recounts in the first entry in his diary memorializing his voyages, his fateful embarkation in 1492 coincided exactly with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. Leon’s haunting memoir of her Iberian journey along the *Caminos de Sefarad* and especially her visit to the ruined Jewish cemetery in Plasencia, Extremadura, evokes this history of compulsory diaspora as she returns from the so-called New World to search for gleanings of her lost Sephardic self in the fragmented signage of Spanish heritage tourism. But at the very moment the population of Spain contracted with the expulsion of the Jews, Columbus launched his world-historic expansion: misdirected by his reading of *The Travels of Marco Polo* (ca. 1300), his clueless argosy ultimately spawned an empire vaster than Kublai Khan. At its apogee Latin American colonial rule encompassed a hemisphere, which in its decolonial present features many “touristy” destinations. These range from New Orleans, where the built environment of the “French” Quarter dates from the Spanish regime that reached as far north as present-day Montana (formerly Montaña) all the way down to Ushuaia, capital city of Tierra del Fuego, where you can see Antarctica on a clear day.

Ghosting the colonial Monarquía Española, Bryan Schmidt’s Ballena Coast of Costa Rica and Henry Castillo’s Cartagena are hotspots on the Latin American tour, though each has an Iberian namesake located on Spain’s Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts, respectively. Discussing the annual Envision Festival as a virtual event taking place at an actual destination—Rancho la Merced (a former cow pasture “nestled between the verdant jungle and tranquil sea”) near the tiny village of Uvita in Puntarenas Province on the

Costa Ballena (“Whale Beach”)—Schmidt evokes the eco-conscious precedent of the Burning Man Festival to characterize this week-long New Age fête. Every February–March since 2011, the Brigadoon-like invisible city of the Envision Festival swells to a population of 5,000+ pilgrims mainly from the Global North seeking to experience Pura Vida (“Pure Life”) by making “primal connections” through yoga, immersive workshops, and pre-packaged “sacred ceremonies” performed by hired Indigenous peoples or appropriated from them. The pitch: “connect with your true self,” get in touch with your “inner shaman,” and “find your spiritual tribe.” Skeptics might imagine how the continuing success of the Envision Festival could have made more plausible the social media campaign that enabled fraudster Billy McFarland to strand thousands of well-heeled dupes at an un-provisioned site on the Bahamian island of Great Exuma for the notorious Fyre Festival (2017). But enough Envision Festival visitors attest to its value that it posts a waiting list one year ahead of the next iteration.

Discussing Black female *Palenqueras*, the festively costumed Colombian fruit and sweet merchants who smilingly balance their wares in baskets on their heads, Castillo probes the racial spin of heritage tourism along the Circum-Caribbean rim. Here history accumulates in layers from antiquity through the age of early modern conquest and the American holocaust, the Middle Passage, revolution, de-colonization, and the new economies of extraction with their most innovative commodity: experience. Indeed, thoughtful visitors must stand humbled before the magnitude of imperial time. Iberian Cartagena was founded by Carthaginians ca. 220 BCE. American Cartagena was founded by Spaniards in 1533 CE. Both powers conquered and assimilated local peoples who had been living under their own intricate hegemonies for millennia. Such destinations as these cannot be visited fully today without imagining the invisible empires that built them in the first place, those that burnt them only to build them anew, and still others that have been rebuilding them ever since.

Being there in the presence of such absences prompts the critical self-reflection on which self-making depends. This approach highlights the qualitative difference between tourism (as conventionally understood) and visitation. It does so by acknowledging the value of interactions between what is readily apparent and what cannot be seen until it has been imagined. All three contributors to “Staging Identities” write vividly in the sharp-eyed style of first-hand participant-observant visitors. But despite the apparently high visibility of their destinations, all three, like Calvino, also feel the imaginative

pressure exerted by what can't be seen: living Jews, non-curated Indigenes, and middle-class Blacks, respectively. These contributors must therefore imagine cities that once were there but now are gone, cities that will be there in the future but that exist only as plans, cities that live only in dreams and never will be, and cities that are hiding in plain sight all around the visitor. Such cities will likely remain unseen until visitors who know *how* to look make them visible by careful notation of *what* is and isn't there. That means keeping in mind that the first thing to look for is what they can't see at first sight, even (or especially) if the visit is as simple as taking a walk through an abandoned necropolis, along the jungle-fringed shore, or in the streets of the old city.

Always on the alert to catch a lucky glimpse of the unseen, prescient visitors recognize two overlapping phases of experience—perception and interpretation—which, extrapolating from the three visitations documented here, might be separated into eight modes of inquiry. The perceptual modes are *optics* (what do they see? and what don't they see?), *sonics* (what do they hear? and what don't they hear?), and *mnemonics* (what do they know and what don't they know?). In this perceptual phase, it is also useful to take any opportunity to engage the other senses as well: tactile, proprioceptive, olfactory, and gustatory. The interpretive modes correspond to different kinds of human performance or given-to-be-seen behaviors in the host culture: *kinesics* (movements), *proxemics* (groupings), *histrionics* (interactions, including physical presentation such as dress), *architectonics* (the built environment), and *forensics* (the social consequences of the above, and their likely causes). The effective practice of this method does not require practitioners to use all of this terminology, or even any of it; what it does require is a willingness to imagine what they know, feel what they perceive, and interrogate what they do and don't see.

In service of their forensics, the three contributors share a mnemonic. Leon's impulse to clean up the refuse and repair the neglected signage at Plasencia, Schmidt's field notes on the bamboo walled and thatch-roofed venues that rise out of the "pristine wilderness" of the erstwhile cattle ranch, and Castillo's observation of the creation of a Black female "icon" (available for photos) now reproduced within the bastions of the Walled City but the imagined historic product of the nearby Maroon "free city" of San Basilio de Palenque (chartered 1691)—all involve prior knowledge of a powerful abstraction that can't be seen until it has been imagined: "heritage."

However abstract mnemonically, heritage, viewed forensically, is also

a business plan. The visitor can join the tour to walk among the ruined gravesites, catch up on traditional healing practices and ceremonies, or taste the colorful head-borne fruit; but the visitor is thus interpellated by the fore-knowledge that each site is identified and contained by an invisible perimeter of specially assigned meanings and values. Enter the United Nations. UNESCO's World Heritage program recognizes three types of places or practices that possess "Outstanding Universal Value." The first category consists of tangible cultural heritage, including sites of extraordinary artistic or historic significance such as Angkor Wat or the slave forts along the West African coast. The second includes sites of tangible natural heritage, represented by the Galapagos Islands, for example, or the Central Amazon Conservation Complex. The third—and the most likely to interest performance studies scholars—is intangible cultural heritage. Sometimes but not always linked to a specific geographical site, intangible cultural heritage includes live arts (dance, music, oral poetry), craft traditions, culinary and medicinal practices. UNESCO's goal is "preservation" through strategies of local development financed by global tourism. That the goal and the strategies can sometimes come into sharp conflict is too self-evident to belabor. Nor are all the locals equally thrilled to learn that their culture is the world's heritage. But the ambitious agenda of heritage tourism inflects the self-making opportunities at each of the destinations discussed in this section.

UNESCO and the International Monetary Fund have partnered to support the development of the Red de Juderías de España to oversee the Caminos de Sefarad. Costa Rica, with nearly 30% of its land area set aside as national parks and nature preserves that stretch from mountain ranges to rainforests, boasts three UNESCO sites of World Natural Heritage. Old Town Cartagena has been a World Cultural Heritage site since 1984, and the performances of San Basilio de Palenque have been collectively designated a "Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity." Visitations to such places or practices thus arrive not only at a destination but also at a well-credentialed, world-class attraction.

Attractions tend toward the labor-intensive. Even the unmaintained Jewish cemetery at Plasencia employs an apologist at its gate. Envision books internationally recognized bands and teams of yogis, artisans, and service workers. Colorful fruit merchants abound at every cruise ship's port of call but especially in Cartagena. The self-making obligations imposed on the native actors by such tourist performances reappear in Leon's attendant, Schmidt's Yawanawa Song Teachers, and Castillo's palenqueras. To stage an

identity, as actors well know, is to make a self. True, when the local sacred ritual has three showings a day, profane intention hollows out “authentic” tradition. But visitation, properly understood, proves that authenticity is chimerical, not only in the eye of the beholder but also in that of the beheld, and in the space opened up by its superannuation, new and dynamic meanings can begin to emerge.

Calvino writes fiction, but his fables provoke theory. Marco Polo recounts the distinctive character of Ersilia, another of the magical cities on his itinerary: “In Ersilia, to establish the relationships that sustain the city’s life, the inhabitants stretch strings from the corners of the houses, white or black or gray or black-and-white according to whether they mark a relationship of blood, of trade, authority, agency. When the strings become so numerous that you can no longer pass among them, the inhabitants leave; the houses are dismantled; only the strings and their supports remain.” *Blood, trade, authority, and agency* sum up as well as any four words can what the visitor, as late-arriving guest, humbly seeks to understand about the host destination and its fugitive inhabitants. Therefore, let not the inquisitive visitor or anyone else despise the tourist performer who fires the imagination of travelers with sights seen and unseen.

### Note

1. Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego: Harcourt, 1974).

## CHAPTER 1

# By Means of Visitation

## *Tourism and Identity on Spain's Sephardic Way*

Mechele Leon

### Roots, Longing, and Identity

The Jewish cemetery in Spain's city of Plasencia, in the western autonomous community of Extremadura, sits on a rugged hilltop in a residential neighborhood. It is a short distance from the center of the old city, but the way is steep. I was warned by an agent at the tourist office who gave me an apologetic look as she said it that, yes, the cemetery can be visited but it was not maintained. It was a hot and dusty walk up a ragged hill. As I climbed, I saw a path marked by a post-and-wire fence. It led me past a rotted wooden display stand, about four feet tall. It was meant to hold informational signage but now stood empty. There were discarded soda cans and plastic bottles lying around. I sidestepped dog feces. I made my way further along the path, taking photos and wondering just what exactly I was going to see up here. What I then came upon brought me to a sudden stop. I had imagined an empty field, the landscape of a cemetery devoid of its stones and long faded into the earth. Instead, I found holes. Holes scattered all over the top of the hill. Body-sized and trapezoid shaped, these deep and empty cavities could not have shocked me more than if I had stumbled upon actual skeletons of my distant Iberian ancestors.

I was visiting Plasencia's cemetery in summer 2023 while exploring the cities on Spain's *Caminos de Sefarad* [Sephardic Pathways]. *Sefarad* refers to the traditional name of the Iberian Peninsula as it was known to its Jewish population since Roman antiquity. Sephardic peoples today, called Sephardim, identify as descendants of the population that was expelled from the territory in a 1492 royal edict that effectively demanded conversion to Cathol-

icism or exile from most of the territories that today comprise the country of Spain. The expulsion of the Jews of Spain, followed by Portugal's forced conversion of its Sephardic population, tragically ended a Jewish world that had flourished for more than a thousand years. It also birthed a diaspora that now extends across the globe.

The Caminos de Sefarad is a heritage tourism product of impressive scope and ambition. Twenty-one cities, extending from Lucena in Andalusia in the south to Monforte de Lemos and Tui in northwest Galicia, currently make up this non-linear, multiple-location route comprised of the remains of medieval Jewish neighborhoods. The project is designed to attract domestic and international tourists interested in Hispano-Jewish cultural heritage. Attractions along the route include the remains of synagogues, ritual baths, the former dwellings of Jewish families, cemeteries, Jewish tanneries and kosher slaughterhouses. These sights are typically contained within neighborhoods in the oldest parts of Spanish towns and cities that once held a Jewish community. In addition to these Jewish quarters with their architectural remains, tourists can visit newly crafted museums and educational exhibits related to Sephardic history and Jewish customs. The Caminos route is geographically diffuse, but it is united thematically by strategic branding through its website, guidebooks, videos, and social media. For each member city, uniformly designed guidebooks provide visitors with a sightseeing manual and walking agenda in the form of a mapped itinerary pointing out the *lugares de interés judíos*, or "places of Jewish interest." In these guidebooks, episodes in the city's Jewish history appear on a picture-filled timeline alongside key events in Spanish history. The cities themselves are branded: the logo of the Caminos de Sefarad (which spells out the word "Sefarad" in Hebrew arranged in the shape of the Iberian Peninsula) can be spotted at tourist offices, on plaques mounted on buildings, and embedded into the pavement of streets to mark entry into the Jewish quarter. Buildings within these neighborhoods are often decorated with the six-point Star of David, menorahs, or symbols from the Hebrew alphabet. Travelers on the Caminos can obtain a "passport" and have it stamped at each local tourist office. In brief, the Sephardic Pathways project employs a range of discursive and material strategies to construct continuity for the dispersed route and make it legible as a coherent adventure for those the tourism literature calls *Los Descubridores de Sefarad* [Discoverers of Sepharad].

Developing and maintaining the Sephardic Pathways is the primary activity for its controlling organization, the nonprofit association Red de Juderías

de España [Network of Jewish Quarters of Spain], founded in 1995. The member cities are central to Spain's participation in the European Days of Jewish Culture annual events. More than two decades since it was created, the Caminos de Sefarad is an established success. The Red de Juderías de España is associated with the Europe-wide system of cultural routes developed by the Council of Europe and is a founding member of the European Association for the Preservation and Promotion of Jewish Culture and Heritage (AEPJ). "There is probably no other project," noted one researcher in 2013, "comparable in scope and organization to that undertaken by RED in Spain."<sup>1</sup> More than ten years on, this is still true. After the beach cities that line the *costas* and the Way of St. James (the Camino de Santiago), the "Sephardic Way" is among Spain's most significant tourist attractions.<sup>2</sup>

Visiting all the towns and cities of the Caminos is a daunting endeavor. It is, however, a journey that I have undertaken as a participant in one of contemporary tourism's most active and lucrative sectors: roots tourism. Spain—by way of Istanbul, Havana, New York City, and five hundred years—is one of my ancestral homelands. I was raised in a Jewish family with strong ties to our Sephardic identity through language, foodways, and community association. After Spain enacted a law in 2015 by which Sephardic descendants could seek reparative citizenship, I applied and eventually gained Spanish nationality. Citizenship by descent adds another layer to my identity on this journey. Sephardic heritage tourism and citizenship are companion journeys for me, homologous acts of return.<sup>3</sup> I am a Sephardic body traveling the historic byways of the Sephardic tourism route as well as an artifact of that history.

Also called "diaspora tourism" or "personal heritage tourism," roots tourism is a category of visitation that has soared in popularity in tandem with the boom in hobbyist genealogy, computer-based family history, and ancestral genetic analyses. *Finding Your Roots* and similar television programming dramatizes the emotional impact experienced through ancestral discovery.<sup>4</sup> Typically viewed as a New World-to-Old World trajectory, roots tourism can be found anywhere that distanced populations, separated (or forcibly taken) from ancestral homelands, undertake a return or homecoming. Ludic or serious, entertaining or dark, diaspora tourism has complex and varied motivations. These can include objective goals such as discovering unknown relatives and conducting archival research, or they can be motivated by affective urges seeking healing and closure. Roots travelers "come in search of imagined homes—the soil that nurtured the ancestors, the landscapes that met their eyes, the sounds and smells and tastes that we imagine still dwell

deep in our primordial memories.”<sup>5</sup> This form of visitation offers a journey to places of collective memory, a memory “not merely of the specific historical experiences that occurred there, but also of the entire lost life-world of the pre-diasporic population.”<sup>6</sup> Sometimes described as a pilgrimage, roots tourism has the marks of a spiritual quest, one in which individuals “leave home, separating themselves from familiar routines and spaces. They undertake a journey to a ‘far place,’ often an expensive and time-consuming journey.”<sup>7</sup> The destination for the pilgrimage is a place—the ancestral homeland—but also a time: the past. Personal heritage tourists, like those who participate in historical reenactment activities, venture into a temporal double-time where “times cross and, in crossing, in some way touch.”<sup>8</sup>

To search for lost kin, gaze on ancestral landscapes, reconstitute a lost life-world, finally close a wound—roots tourism is all these things. Planes and trains might be involved, but longing is its truest means of transport. In this sense, roots tourism reflects a type of homesickness. It manifests the longing we call nostalgia. In her now classic study on the subject, Svetlana Boym writes that nostalgia seeks “a home that no longer exists or has never existed.”<sup>9</sup> Longing is not exclusively bound to a sentimentalized desire to recover the past, however. It can accommodate the distance between past and present, becoming a “reflective nostalgia.”<sup>10</sup> Reflective nostalgia allows us to dwell on the sense of history. It sparks a ludic practice that resolves homesickness through irony and humor. Importantly, reflective nostalgia means that “longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another.”<sup>11</sup> In my approach to personal heritage tourism, I attempt to bring both longing and critical thinking with me as I explore Spain as my locus of return.

Based on fieldwork undertaken over several years of traveling the Caminos de Sefarad, what follows in this chapter is my account of visits to one category of places on the route: cemeteries.<sup>12</sup> Medieval Jewish cemeteries are multi-layered vestiges of Hispano-Jewish history, but they can be stubbornly illegible when performing as a tourist attraction. They appear in various forms, from urban coordinates and indiscernible fragments to museum objects and memorials. To visit what are designated as “cemeteries” on the itineraries of the Caminos de Sefarad is to encounter what is *not* there, what has been removed, appropriated, displaced, or replaced. In cemeteries, the ancestral past appears in the form of absence. Absences, of course, can be rich with possibility, as theater and performance scholars—experts in studying the remains of ephemeral phenomena—well know. The problem is “how to take the measure of the missing” writes theater historian Odai Johnson,

“how to pause awhile and prompt the eye to inhabit the loss and allow the missing a chance to be present again.”<sup>13</sup>

This essay is a personal narrative and critical account of what I found in visiting cemeteries along Spain’s Jewish heritage route. “Tourism is a practice of ontological knowledge,” writes David Crouch, “an encounter with space that is both social and incorporates an embodied ‘feeling of doing.’”<sup>14</sup> In my way of doing tourism, I strive to make space for the “meanings, experiences, and knowledge created by, in and for the body.”<sup>15</sup> I share the results here in ways that honestly convey my recalled experiences, yet acknowledge the inevitable, performative nature of the first-person voice. The performative “I,” according to Della Pollock, “enjoys neither the presumption of a foundational ontology nor the convenience of conventional claims to authenticity. It is (only) possibly real. It is made real through the performance of writing.”<sup>16</sup> What follows, in sum, recounts my roots tourism in Spain as a visitation practice of embodied, affective, imaginative, and spiritual engagement, fueled by longing, both critical and ludic, in which I am a spectator-participant in a genealogically inspired romance called “ancestral homeland.”

## Cemeteries: Phantom, Memorial, and Displaced

Jewish cemeteries can be among the most striking sights to see on the Caminos de Sefarad. Cemeteries were central to the identity of their communities: sacred places where the dead, buried through practices that are strictly prescribed, were honored in a *bet olam*, an eternal home. Sephardic cemeteries were located outside the community, typically on hilltops or across rivers and in uncultivated ground, per Talmudic instruction. The gravesites were dug into the ground or hollowed into a cave. The bodies, wrapped in linen, were placed directly in contact with the earth or on a wooden plank. Engraved tombstones were placed horizontally over the gravesite; alternatively, small vertical posts marked the burial or graves were protected by stones framing the site. Families were expected to continue to honor their dead with visits to gravesites at special times of the year. By Jewish law, graves were to remain undisturbed.<sup>17</sup>

The fate of Jewish cemeteries after the 1492 Edict of Expulsion can be summarized in a word: desecration. In most every city shortly following the exile, Jewish gravestones were removed and repurposed for private, church, or civic construction. Graves were plundered or just as often left in place

and built over. Today, very few of these cemeteries have survived for viewing. In some cases, they are simply a location woven into the city's fabric. Others have surfaced when human remains of a Jewish necropolis were discovered, usually during urban development. The excavation of some sites meant removing human remains and leaving burial pits exposed. Disinterred remains have been treated to scientific study and reinterred. Funerary monuments that have been recovered (or replicas of them) are displayed in archaeological museums throughout Spain. There are excavated cemeteries developed into tourist sights, but others are only a description in sources such as the website for the IAJGS International Cemetery Project, which catalogs Jewish burial sites throughout the world.<sup>18</sup>

Nine of the twenty-one member cities of the Caminos de Sefarad include a cemetery on the list of "Places of Jewish Interest." Since Jewish cemeteries were established outside the medieval town, visiting them today can mean following arrows pointing off the map and thus outside of the Jewish Quarter, a "symbolic topography" that is the primary organizing feature of tourism on the Caminos (as well as in many European cities).<sup>19</sup> It is worth noting how sightseeing in Spain's Sephardic cemeteries contrasts with that of other cemeteries in Europe. The European Cemetery Route, part of the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes of Europe, counts dozens of non-Jewish cemeteries in its network.<sup>20</sup> These must-see sites for many tourists are unmistakable in their legibility as cemeteries, with their jumble of towering monuments, fantastical statuary, and famous (or infamous) dead. But what are presented as cemeteries along pathways of Sephardic history in Spain are far less obvious. A visit to a Jewish cemetery on the Caminos de Sefarad can yield anything from a parking lot to an excavated field to a graffiti-covered marker. The variety of these sites suggests that the word "cemetery" is quite the unstable signifier in Sephardic tourism.

The first challenge to visiting Jewish cemeteries appears in places where there is no excavation, no plaque, nor indeed, *any* material evidence remaining *in situ* of a Jewish necropolis. They are known only because of archival documents and lore, and on that thin basis become an item in tourism guidebooks. In Córdoba (Andalusia), following the map to the Fonsario o Cementerio Judío took me on a route that deposited me at an intersection between the multi-lane urban traffic-way of the Avenida Vallellano, a municipal parking lot for day tourists, a hermitage, and a fourteenth-century gate providing entry to the southern end of the old city. For the Cementerio Judío in Calahorra (La Rioja), visitors are directed to a pleasant family park outside the old

city. The area that once held the Jewish cemetery in Barcelona is now within the city's imposing Montjuïc (meaning "Hill of the Jews") with its botanical park, sporting areas, and a Christian cemetery dating from the nineteenth century. In the city of León (Castile and León), I stood near a block of modern apartment buildings on a street named to reflect its past as one of León's medieval Jewish burial areas: Prado de los Judíos, or Jew's Meadow.

What to make of these mute places that the tourist is instructed to recognize as cemeteries? With seemingly nothing to actually *see* in these places of *sightseeing*, with no object upon which to focus the touristic gaze, the visitor is guided by imagination and suggestion. Only an intrepid tourist on a mission to see every designated sight on a city's Jewish-themed itinerary (guilty as charged) would seek out these non-places, attempting to envision the graves beneath. They could be called phantom cemeteries for the way they are conjured up for touristic purposes, called into being via the medium of guidebook narratives and validated through the seductive imperatives of touristic itineraries (leave no sight unseen!). However, performance phenomenology offers a more nuanced perspective. Phantom cemeteries are not locations of absence, but rather of ghosting. Ghosts are a "specific force," writes Alice Rayner. They operate in the world (and in theater) to enable us to "encounter the otherwise unseen, unacknowledged, and denied reality of what is not otherwise apparent."<sup>21</sup> Ghosts animate our relationship to the past. They lurk "where secrets are held in time: the secrets of what has been unspoken, unacknowledged; the secrets of the dead."<sup>22</sup> In this way, these "nowhere" cemeteries exist somewhere: on a ghostly cartography that expands the affective reach of the Jewish past for the tourist.

Jewish cemeteries become legible as tourist sites in a more normative sense when they are conveniently visited, recognizable, presentable, dressed-up and restored to a semblance of a properly respectful resting place for the dead. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes that the agency of display gives "dead sites a second life as exhibitions of themselves."<sup>23</sup> On the Caminos de Sefarad, there are cemeteries that have emerged from the silent earth to become exhibits of themselves. Such is the case with the cemeteries at Ávila and Lucena.

A Jewish burial ground in Ávila (Castile and León) was discovered in 2012 during city sewer reconstruction. The site is about one mile north of the center of the walled city (a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1985). When the cemetery was discovered, work was halted for investigation. Excavations found more than one hundred gravesites proving to be from the twelfth to



Figure 1.1. Partial view of the “Jardín de Sefarad” memorial landscape in Ávila, with the walls of the city in the distance. Image by the author.

fifteenth centuries. The cemetery had served a sizable Jewish community whose roots can be traced to the fourth century.<sup>24</sup> The discovery of this Jewish necropolis led to its development as a commemorative landscape that was given the name Jardín de Sefarad [Garden of Sepharad]. Completed in July 2013 by landscape architects Darío Álvarez Álvarez and Miguel Ángel de la Iglesia Santamaría, the garden is not one of flowers or trees, but of stones.

In a grassy field of about half an acre lay a scattering of large, blank stone slabs and short granite stelae. Narrow lines of paving stones embedded in the grass span the north-south axis of the terrain at intervals. The garden is separated from the neighboring apartment buildings by a low wall along its southern side. Visitors approach the site from a tree-lined sidewalk along its northern edge. A viewpoint along the way is marked by a large slab with a hyphenated “Ávila–Sefarad” in Hebrew. Adjacent to the area is an informa-

tional sign explaining the garden. Finally, in the center of this memorial space and adjoining its southern wall is a rather large rectangular plot surrounded by a low railing. It is a collective gravesite for the subsequently reinterred remains that were uncovered during the excavation.

While the placement of the tombstone-like slabs, stelae, and paving stones appears random, the Jardín de Sefarad was carefully designed to provide a specific, multi-layered visual experience. From viewpoints along the northern side, the visitor's eye is meant to follow the lines and markers of the cemetery, seeing in sequence the garden of mortuary monuments, its southern wall marking off the space, and then finally, a mile away and above in the distance, the walls of Ávila and its city landmarks of towers, cathedral, and churches.<sup>25</sup> The garden is thus intended to provide a kind of visually induced time-travel. As the architects explain it, the garden is a "complex interplay of temporal superimpositions: the time of the original medieval cemetery, the subsequent long time as a landscape of disappearance, and the time recovered for the memory of present and future generations."<sup>26</sup> My obedience to the prescribed visual experience of the cemetery came only after I had satisfied an embodied experience in the space. I walked through the garden, among the slabs, past granite posts, and stood alongside the area of reinterment to contemplate the common grave. I was alone in my visit, but I felt joined by others in spirit when I noticed that earlier visitors had placed small stones on the slabs, following the Jewish tradition of leaving a stone or pebble when visiting a grave as an act of remembrance. Then I did the same; I walked from slab to slab, placing my pebbles. In doing so, I had turned my touristic visitation into a ritual of honoring the dead, transforming what were artistic representations of tombstones into, for a brief while, actual tombstones.

Municipal development led to a similar discovery in the town of Lucena in Andalusia. A large Jewish cemetery was found in 2006 during an excavation for a new ring road in the southern part of the city. Investigation was undertaken and eventually 346 gravesites were catalogued, indicating burials as early as the eighth century but predominantly from the eleventh century.<sup>27</sup> This was the period near the end of Jewish presence in this once-famed capital of Talmudic learning known then as Eliossana. The transformation from first discovery of bodies in 2006 to its current form as a preeminent site for Jewish heritage tourism took seven years. First, remains that had been removed during the excavation (some of which had been under anthropological investigation at the University of Granada) were reinterred in 2011 in a ceremony presided over by Rabbinical authorities.<sup>28</sup> The cemetery opened

for visitors in 2013. However, it became fully developed as a memorial site through an enhancement project that its architects entitled *La Ruta de los Antepasados*, or 'The Ancestors' Pathway'.<sup>29</sup> The visitable area is just under a quarter of an acre, located on a hill. It is protected with perimeter fencing. Visitors first encounter panels that provide information about the Jewish history of Lucena, Jewish burial practices, and the discovery and excavation of the necropolis. A sculpture represents the four types of tombs that were uncovered at the site. A stone wall several feet long is crafted to resemble Jerusalem's Wailing Wall and duly named the *muro de las lamentaciones*. Each reinterment is represented by a small plot of pebbles, encircled by a metal band, and provided a marker with a number and the logo for the Caminos de Sefarad. Partially encircling the cemetery is a raised wooden walkway. It has three viewpoints along the pathway that represent, in the project's conception, three phases of Jewish mourning. If the intention of Ávila's Jardín de Sefarad is to shape the tourist's encounter with ancestral history by offering a visual field of spatial and temporal complexity, Lucena's Necrópolis Judía is predicated on a physical voyage along this metaphorical pathway to ancestral communion.

What the cemeteries at Lucena and Ávila have in common is the magic of tidying up. Techniques of display transformed them into exemplary sights for Jewish heritage tourism in Spain. They received treatments that created in the excavated graveyards a legible, aesthetic presentation that valorizes them as visitable sites of memory. These cemeteries were revealed by accident and might have remained invisible. They could have been left (as Lucena was for several years) as excavation sites for archeologists, but Ávila and Lucena were eventually monumentalized. They are no longer mere locations. Through the work of display, they have become destinations.

There is an additional layer of meaning in the designation of Ávila's Jardín de Sefarad as a series of temporal and spatial layers that unfold to the tourist's eye, taking it from the careful placement of objects that resemble tombstones, to the enclosure of reinterred remains, to the wall marking off the space of sepulchral memorial, until the eye is drawn up to Ávila's story-book wall. Because what can also be found in that celebrated wall are pieces of tombstones embedded within it that came from Jewish cemeteries. After the expulsion, grave markers were removed and used as building materials. Over the centuries, some of those cemetery stones were employed to maintain the city's famed wall.<sup>30</sup> The fragments of burial stones in Ávila's wall are thus a kind of displaced cemetery. Guidebooks for the Caminos provide

similar examples of this phenomenon. While there is no Jewish cemetery to visit in Barcelona, for example, the guidebook points tourists to the façade of the Palau del Lloctinent to see carved stones from the Jewish cemetery of Montjuïc that, over the centuries, were taken as construction material. In Lucena in 1958, an eleventh-century headstone belonging to one Rabbi Amicos was discovered in the wall of a building in the old city. In the Catalan town of Girona, Hebrew-inscribed tombstones make up elements of the towers of Palau-Sacosta, a fifteenth-century castle.<sup>31</sup> In this displacement, my journey to the ancestral past is directed away from typical monuments of tourist interest to odd, intriguing objects that invite a different way of knowing cemeteries. In my travels, I fell quite naturally into the game of searching for these traces. On the lookout for hidden Jewish grave markers, I found myself adapting to the logic of a scavenger hunt. I also wondered why these fragments were remarked upon in the guidebooks. After all, the Jewish tombstones had been effectively repurposed as building materials and had vanished into the structures that contained them. Sephardic tourism, however, reawakened their appearance, this time as display; the stones were now mapped into the touristic itinerary and placed among the catalog of sights now designated to speak about the Jewish past.

A second life for such sepulchral materials, similarly fragmented and displaced, occurs in the form of museum lapidary exhibits throughout Spain. In Girona, Béjar, Córdoba, León, Lucena, Sagunto, and Toledo, museums display *ex situ* Jewish cemetery remains for the heritage tourist to view. Recovered tombstones are displayed in local and regional archeological museums, as is the case in Lucena and Córdoba. In Sagunto, four recovered tombstones with Hebrew engravings are displayed at Sagunto Castle Museum in a special exhibit area called the Antiquarium Epigráfico. Béjar is where a twelfth-century grave marker of one Doña Faduéna was found; the David Melul Jewish Museum in that city contains a replica of it. The original is in Toledo (Castile-La Mancha) at the Museo Sefardí, where it is displayed in an outdoor space that the museum calls the Jardín de la Memoria. Echoing Ávila's Jardín, this Garden of Memory is an area of the museum staged as a representative necropolis. It displays a collection of engraved stone markers that were found in cemeteries throughout Spain, condensing time and space through juxtaposition. In Girona, the Museum of Jewish History has stones recovered from cemeteries in Catalonia displayed within a visually provocative exhibit. Here, a rich photographic landscape is projected onto the floors and walls of a darkly lit exhibition space, where the landscape provides its only light.

There is a projected map that reproduces a funerary procession. Such staging of cemetery material provokes a quasi-theatrical experience: a sense of entering a sacred place, somehow both beneath and above the land, while also being transported in time. These remains of grave markers that have been collected and artfully arranged for museum display provide an example of what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls “artifactual autonomy.” Fragments in the world can be removed from social space, collected, and displayed in museums because they are endowed, by potent interests, with an autonomy that “makes it possible to display objects in and of themselves” and relocate them in the “conceptual space of the inventory.”<sup>32</sup> These floating remains of Jewish cemeteries in museums, no less than remains refashioned as building materials, are unmoored from their historical place and cast into the world of a sightseeing inventory.

## Holes of Particular Contour

With these memorials crafted from Jewish gravesites, what to make of Plasencia’s cemetery—that raw, unkempt, weedy field of empty graves? Both Ávila and Plasencia are visitable cemeteries, but Plasencia is quite different in terms of touristic prestige. Viewing its sorry state, I found myself drawn to adopt the role of stopgap caretaker for my ancestors’ eternal home. I picked my way through the cemetery gathering up stray garbage. While doing so, I caught sight of something hidden under a bush. It was the informational signage that had been separated from its display post! Had it been pulled off by a chance wind or torn violently from its post, I wondered, aware of the instances of graffiti I had seen in my travels where Jewish sites were sometimes defaced? Bleached from the harsh Extremadura sun and dirty with spattered mud, the panel provided information about the cemetery alongside a sketched map of medieval Plasencia and a photo of elaborately carved headstones with Hebrew engravings, the monuments that are typical to Eastern European Jewish cemeteries. I looked for a way to reattach the sign to its mount. Three attempts at affixing it with a rock failed. Finally, I left the sign on the ground, at the foot of the wood pillar, anchored by its lonely rock.

Plasencia’s cemetery compares unfavorably to polished commemorative cemeteries like Ávila’s Jardín de Sefarad or La Ruta de los Antepasados in Lucena. The same is true for Plasencia’s more finely groomed sister, the Jewish cemetery in Segovia.<sup>33</sup> It too is an excavated cemetery on a hill outside the walls of the city. First uncovered in 1886, the area called El Pinarillo is a small



Figure 1.2. Excavated grave at the Jewish cemetery “El Berrocal” in Plasencia. Image by the author.

section of excavated gravesites in what is estimated to have been a five-acre necropolis that was used for centuries by the Jewish community of Segovia. It consists of a hillside patch of open graves and burial caves. More tourist friendly than Plasencia’s cemetery, there is an impressive sign announcing the cemetery at the beginning of a trail that climbs through the area. Visitors are provided with benches to rest and contemplate. The view across the valley to the old city of Segovia is spectacular, but more arresting to my eyes is another sight: the body-shaped cavities at my feet. I experienced few places in my grand tour of the sights on the Caminos de Sefarad that were so affecting. Looking at the cavities in both Plasencia and Segovia, I communed with bodies—bodies absent but sensed, ancestors unknown but somehow now felt. The holes of the cemetery of Segovia, like those of Plasencia, struck me vividly precisely because of what was *not* there—human remains, vessels to hold them, markers to commemorate them. I contemplated that loss. I sensed in my body that disorientating meeting of past and present that Schneider refers to as those temporal frames that “in some way touch.” The cavities are vacant—that much is evident—but they are not empty. What they contain is

real, but not real in a way that can be curated into memorials, displayed in museums, or repurposed into building materials. In this sense, the cemeteries of Plasencia and Segovia are not enjoying a “second life as exhibitions of themselves” to recall Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. On the contrary, they remain stubbornly *first life*. They present exactly what they are: burial pits. What these holes of such particular contour once held is unmistakable.

Cavities of similar haunting presence exist in another form on the *Caminos de Sefarad*. These holes are several inches long and can be found carved into medieval stone doorways. They are believed to have once held mezuzahs—small cylindrical or rectangular cases containing biblical verses. By Jewish law, mezuzahs are to be affixed to doorposts of Jewish homes for reasons of piety and protection. Traditionally, residents and guests touch the mezuzah upon entering or leaving the home. The mezuzahs of Sephardic Spain are now gone, but the rare cavity remains. The guidebooks for the cities of the *Caminos* instruct tourists where they may be found. In Barcelona, for instance, we are directed to look for a stone somewhere on the street of the Arc de Sant Ramon that has a carving in a distinct oblong shape. In Ávila, there is a hole for a mezuzah apparent in the doorway of a medieval building. This hole is now carved over, palimpsest-like, with a cross. For the Valencian city of Sagunto, the guidebook tells us that a mezuzah hole found there is a testimony to the daily life of the Jewish quarter. “The centuries could not erase that deep groove which, with a mere glance, takes us to a time when Jews walked the streets of Sagunto.”<sup>34</sup> Walking the streets on my Sephardic journey, this Jew kept her eyes on the lookout, mezuzah level, for those tell-tale holes. I had been visiting the Jewish quarter in Cáceres for several days, treading the Jewish Quarter several times over and looking at all the sights, when I finally spotted on a handsome home the mezuzah hole referenced in the guidebook.

It is described as a trace of the past that “time could not erase . . . a silent witness of many centuries [that] continues to whisper to travelers: ‘Here they lived; they laughed and cried; they sang and celebrated every Friday at sunset, the Shabbat.’”<sup>35</sup> I took several requisite photos, approached the house, and touched my hand to the empty hole.

## Conclusion: By Means of Visitation

I have written about visiting cemeteries as I found them: as phantoms, curated memorials, as displaced and fragmented sepulchral material, and as cavities



Figure 1.3. Carved hole in a doorpost of a private home in Cáceres, believed to have once held a mezuzah. Image by the author.

of telling emptiness. No doubt, these are complex tourism sights to make sense of. Cemeteries could be said to represent a problem that, in the opinion of some scholars, besets the entire *Caminos de Sefarad* project: “Most of these towns and so-called Jewish Quarters embody a wishful cultural fantasy of visibility, one in which traces of Jewishness can be experienced by the visitor when, in fact, no traces of Jewishness are visible or likely to be experienced.”<sup>36</sup> The counterargument to this assumption that the Jewish quarters offer “cultural fantasy” without visibility or experience can be found precisely in the promise of visitation. It is by means of visitation that experiences materialize and the invisible becomes visible. The physical configurations of these cemeteries invited corresponding variations in the way I performed on these tourism stages.<sup>37</sup> From Ávila’s *Jardín de Sefarad*, I gazed at the proscenium-like view of the city. I moved through its landscape, placing pebbles and stones in a ritual of Jewish remembrance. I trod the boards/boardwalk called the Ancestors’ Pathway on its little journey through Lucena’s cemetery, and I

bowed my head at its stage-set Wailing Wall. I adopted the role of caretaker for the cemetery at Plasencia and ludically embarked on a scavenger hunt for hidden Hebrew inscriptions. As for those phantom cemeteries, I gamely sought out the ghosts, choosing to play along with the guidebook descriptions that painted the scenery, telling me that somewhere outside the old city, in a park, under apartment blocks, or maybe at the intersection of a parking lot and rounding a traffic circle, there was a cemetery beneath my feet. My tourist performances were no less meaningful for being drawn from tourism's familiar repertoire of restored behaviors.<sup>38</sup> Quite the opposite: this praxis was the conduit to my discovering the ability of sightseeing to locate meaning and satisfy longing in ancestral tourism.

The challenge that absences pose to the historian, as Johnson points out, is "how to pause awhile and prompt the eye to inhabit the loss and allow the missing a chance to be present again."<sup>39</sup> In roots tourism, visitation is the agency of that special encounter where the lost can be made present again through the power of a motivated seer. It is not guidebooks, maps, or logos baked into street pavements that does the work of return in roots tourism, but the visitor's body that envisions lost cemeteries at modern intersections, reads Hebrew engravings in a wall, walks through cemeteries to pick up debris, and makes mezuzahs reappear through the magic of a hand that reaches out to touch a hole.

## Notes

1. Shaul Krakover, "Generation of a Tourism Product: Jewish Heritage Tourism in Spain," *Enlightening Tourism* 3, no. 2 (2013): 142–168, 159. Portugal established a similar network in 2011. On the AEPJ see <https://jewishheritage.org/edjc>. The Council of Europe currently has forty-seven cultural routes, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/>

2. For a fuller description of the network see <https://redjuderias.org>. See also Daniela Flesler and Adrián Pérez Melgosa, *The Memory Work of Jewish Spain* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020); Jeffrey S. Juris, "Los Caminos de Sefarad," *Revista de Antropología Social* 14 (2005): 241–279; Assumpció Hosta y Rebés, "Red de Juderías de España-Caminos de Sefarad: proyecto construcción," *E-RPH: Revista de Electrónica Patrimonio Histórico* 5 (2009): 63–75.

3. The trope of a "return" is common in the academic and journalistic literature about Spain's Sephardic citizenship law, for example Pierre Assouline, *Retour à Séfarad* (Paris, France: Gallimard, 2018).

4. Dallen J. Timothy and Jeanne Kay Guelke, eds., *Geography and Genealogy: Locating Personal Pasts* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate 2008), 114–135.

5. Jackie Hogan, *Roots Quest: Inside America's Genealogy Boom* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield 2019), 161. See also Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

6. Naomi Leite, "Travelers to an Ancestral Past: On Diasporic Tourism, Embodied Memory, and Identity," *Antropológicas* 9 (2005): 273–302, 282.

7. Hogan, *Roots Quest*, 144; Leite, "Travelers to an Ancestral Past," 279.

8. Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London; New York: Routledge, 2011), 37.

9. Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xiii.

10. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 49.

11. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 49.

12. This research is for a book-length study of Jewish heritage tourism in Spain, in progress. Tourism sights discussed in this essay are based on my visits to all twenty-one cities on the route, conducted in 2022, 2023, and 2024.

13. Odai Johnson, "The Size of All That's Missing," in *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance Historiography*, ed. Tracy C. Davis and Peter W. Marx (London; New York: Routledge, 2021), 43–64, 44.

14. David Crouch, "Surrounded by Place: Embodied Encounters," in *Tourism: Between Place and Performance*, ed. Simon Coleman and Mike Crang (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 207–219, 207.

15. Soile Veijola and Eeva Jokinen, "The Body in Tourism," *Theory, Culture & Society* 11, no. 3 (August 1, 1994): 125–151, 135.

16. Della Pollock, "The Performative 'I,'" *Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies* 7, no. 3 (2007): 239–255, 247.

17. Cyrus Adler and Isidore Singer, eds., "Burial," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, 3, 432–437 (New York: KTAV Pub. House, 1901); Meir Ydit and Sefton D. Temkin, "Cemetery," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 4 (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 538–539.

18. International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies. "IAJGS International Cemetery Project," n.d., <http://iajgscemetery.org/western-europe/spain/>

19. Eszter B. Gantner, "Interpreting the Jewish Quarter," *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 23, no. 2 (2014): 26–42, 38.

20. Council of Europe, "Council of Europe. European Cemeteries Route." Accessed February 1, 2024. <https://cemeteriesroute.eu/european-cemeteries-route.aspx>

21. Alice Rayner, *Ghosts: Death's Double and the Phenomena of Theatre* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 185.

22. Rayner, *Ghosts*, x.

23. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 7.

24. Blas Cabrera González, Jesús Caballero Arribas, and Jorge Díaz de la Torre, "El cementerio judío medieval de 'la Encarnación' en Ávila," *Sefarad* 73, no. 2 (December 30, 2013): 309–338.

25. Darío Álvarez Álvarez and Miguel Ángel de la Iglesia Santamaría, "Jardín de Sefarad. Paisaje Conmemorativo del Antiguo Cementerio Judío de Ávila," Biennial Internacional de Paisatge Barcelona, n.d., <https://www.arquitectes.cat/iframes/paisatge/fitxa/8355>

26. Carlos de Miguel, "El Jardín de Sefarad. Sobre el Cementerio Judío," *Ávilared*, July 25, 2013, <https://avilared.com/art/6047/el-jardin-de-sefarad-sobre-el-cementerio-judio>

27. Daniel Botella Ortega and Jordi Casanovas Miró, "El cementerio judío de Lucena (Córdoba)," *Miscelánea de estudios árabes y hebraicos (MEA)*. Sección Hebreo 58 (2009): 3–25.

28. Nathan Burstein, "Spanish Scientists Take Teeth from Jewish Graveyard," *Times of Israel*, February 15, 2012, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/spanish-scientists-take-teeth-from-jewish-graveyard/>; "Reburial of 170 Remains of Ancient Jewish Cemetery in Lucena Spain," *Yeshiva World*, December 18, 2011, <https://www.theyeshivaworld.com/news/headlines-breaking-stories/112317/reburial-of-170-remains-of-ancient-jewish-cemetery-in-lucena-spain.html>; n.a., "Inaugurada en Lucena (Córdoba) la mayor necrópolis judía excavada en España," *Europa Press*, September 27, 2013.

29. "Estudio Marrero, Arquitectos. La Ruta de los Antepasados." Accessed February 1, 2024. <https://www.estudiomarrero.com/proyectos/24-proyectos/66-la-ruta-de-los-antepasados>

30. The stones with Hebrew engraving were identified by Irit Green, a Haifa-born graphologist residing in Madrid. The engravings are funerary in origin, but some appear to have been removed from synagogues that were destroyed after the expulsion. Green's discoveries are discussed in the Network's guidebook for Ávila and reported in the *Diario de Ávila*, "En la muralla se cuentan muchas piedras hebreas" September 20, 2018, <https://www.diariodeavila.es/noticia/zb0ed2428-d6a4-791a-5b471b8cecd53082/201809/en-la-muralla-se-cuentan-muchas-piedras-hebreas>

31. The city of Girona was a founding member of the Network of Jewish Quarters of Spain but has since left the network. It now manages its Jewish heritage tourism through the *Patronat Call de Girona*, a board within the Girona City Council. The Board manages a Jewish museum and research center. <https://www.girona.cat/call/eng/index.php>

32. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 17, 12.

33. Alcázar Rus Ruiz, *El cementerio judío de Segovia* (Segovia, SP: Ayuntamiento de Segovia, 2011).

34. Caminos de Sefarad. Red de Juderías de España, "Rutas por las juderías de España. Sagunto," February 1, 2024, 22, <https://redjuderias.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Sagunto-web.pdf>

35. "Rutas por las juderías de España. Cáceres." Accessed February 1, 2024, 25, <https://redjuderias.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Caceres-web.pdf>

36. Daniela Flesler and Adrián Pérez Melgosa, *The Memory Work of Jewish Spain*, 111.

37. Tim Edensor, "Staging Tourism: Tourists as Performers," *Annals of Tourism Research* 27, no. 2 (2000): 322–344, 327.

38. Richard Schechner, *Between Theater & Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 35.

39. Johnson, "The Size of All That's Missing," 44.

## CHAPTER 2

# Manufacturing “The *Pura Vida* Effect”

*Costa Rica’s Envision Festival, Pure Life,  
and the Contradictions of Conscious Tourism*

Bryan Schmidt

“Have you heard about the *Pura Vida* Effect?” whispers a mysterious voice.<sup>1</sup> An ethereal soundscape of drumming and didgeridoos plays in the background as a camera intersperses brief snapshots of a tropical paradise: a treehouse overlooking the jungle canopy, a rushing waterfall, a woman blissfully strumming a ukelele on a white sand beach. This 2015 web advertisement for Envision—a music and arts festival held annually in Costa Rica—juxtaposes glimpses of pristine wilderness (rolling hills, luscious lagoons, oceans with endless horizons) alongside action shots and timelapses of the event itself: crowds of young people in eco-chic outfits throb to electronic dance music, fire spinners and circus performers create a grand spectacle, groups of toned yogis downward dog in unison, and participants scurry through a festival marketplace full of thatched roofs and bamboo structures constructed to fit the tropical vibe. The video, titled “The *Pura Vida* Effect,” poetically describes the influx of travelers to the region each year at festival time; its art direction plays on an array of Indigenous tropes to recast these visitors as a natural feature of the Costa Rican landscape. For instance, the ad continues: “Legend has it that once a year this already vibrant place becomes more full of life, that the wildlife become all the more diverse. [ . . . ] If you enter this world, you will meet people so unique, so different, yet somehow deeply connected.” It depicts the festival as a transformative theatrical space wherein transnational participants build powerful, even primal connections with one another by tapping into a collective spirit that transcends differences (e.g., race, language, class, geography) inherent to tourism.

Though the ad does demonstrate Envision's many attractions—great music, meticulous event production, participatory creative activities, tasty food, sexy people—it most importantly attempts to imbue the experience with a deeper sense of meaning and purpose. It does so by aestheticizing the concept of *pura vida*, a phrase that literally translates as “pure life,” and has become something of a lodestar in Costa Rica's tourism industry. The phrase was first popularized by Mexican comedian Clavillazo in his 1956 film *Pura Vida*, but it subsequently became adopted as a common saying throughout Costa Rica. *Pura vida* generally refers to a relaxed and positive outlook on life; in its everyday use it can be used to say “hello,” “goodbye,” “OK,” “thank you,” “you're welcome,” “cool,” or “life's good.”<sup>2</sup> In recent decades, the phrase has also had significant uptake in ecological activist movements around the world for its association with Costa Rica's progressive environmental policies. Many see *pura vida* as a way to express a simple yet mindful way of being that prioritizes care for people and place. In Costa Rica's tourism industry, which has been the country's most important source of income since 1993, *pura vida* has become a marketable catchphrase that simultaneously communicates the country's environmental splendor and its welcoming, hospitable atmosphere.<sup>3</sup> When used to promote Envision—a destination festival that primarily draws white millennials with disposable income from the USA, Canada, and Europe—*pura vida* interlocks with a tribalpunk aesthetic that fetishizes premodern idylls and Indigenous cultural signifiers. It positions the visit to Costa Rica as not merely a pleasure-seeking jungle adventure, but a pathway to personal growth and enlightenment via intimate contact with the spiritual aura of Costa Rican lands and peoples.

In this chapter, I use Envision to demonstrate how tourism refracts cultural heritage by staging land and people within a commercial matrix built through neocolonial imaginaries, ethical tourism discourse, and embodied event repertoires. I argue that destination festivals like Envision help us visualize a complex and sometimes paradoxical process through which the economic and ideological power of the Global North gets projected onto the Global South within conditions of neoliberalism. Although the festival involves the collaboration of both tourists and locals, it is powered by the money international participants bring into Costa Rica, and its outcomes map to a travel marketplace and image economy dominated by the material wealth of the Global North. In recent years Envision has gained substantial institutional control within the Costa Ballena region through its seasonal employment opportunities, logistical demands, and social responsibility

initiatives. The physical infrastructure required to sustain the annual event, and the social dynamics it creates year after year, have calcified to reshape the small towns of Uvita and Dominical closest to where the festival is held. This includes the creation of new businesses that cater to the tastes of global travelers, increased foreign property ownership begun through the free flow of capital, and the insinuation of social tensions around cultural differences between locals and a steadily growing expatriate community. Residents must choose whether to comport themselves to the exotic image of Costa Rica that Envision presents, whether through active participation in the event itself, selling souvenirs on its fringes, or simply playing the happy host. Otherwise, they risk insidious forms of social exclusion and financial precarity as their community rapidly changes.

On paper Envision lasts for only one week, but it has become a major anchor point for longer patterns of travel in the region, and a magnet for permanent foreign-owned businesses and nonprofits. For example, Envision partners with local tour guides, yogis, and artists to stage pre-festival “immersions” and post-festival “decompressions,” which package extended travel experiences built in the event’s image. In 2016, for instance, participants could pay \$1895 to “Decompress in Paradise” through a journey that “magically captures top travel destinations, adventure, and deeply-rooted eco-permaculture principles [. . .] Perfect for anyone wanting to extend their Envision experience and see what locals mean when they say, *pura vida*, the pure life!” Others paid \$150 to stay on-site after the festival ended for a “Shamanic Yoga Retreat” that enabled them to “go deeper on this sacred land [for] an inner journey of transformation, [and to] connect with the shaman inside all of us.”<sup>4</sup>

The exotic fantasy of Costa Rica encapsulated by *pura vida* creates identity capital for international travelers, while also obscuring Envision’s connection to deleterious social outcomes that accompany the travel industry. Destination festivals stage identity by transforming cultural encounters into performative acts, where visitors and hosts co-create a narrative of Costa Ricanness that oscillates between globally circulating cultural imaginaries and embodied performances that valorize those representations to travelers. Envision’s image gets crafted through a diffuse mediascape<sup>5</sup> of event reviews, promotional media (like “The Pura Vida Effect”), travelogues, photo essays, and Instagram posts, which circumscribe the event space and guide participants toward particular businesses, activities, and actors during their Costa Rican journey. Envision helps us understand how visitors become immersed

in the effects of exoticism within a global marketplace, a multimodal operation that tethers the identities of host communities to the desire and momentum of global travelers primed by globally circulating images. As Marta Savigliano has written:

Exoticism is a way of establishing order in an unknown world through fantasy; a daydream guided by pleasurable self-reassurance and expansionism. It is the seemingly harmless side of exploitation, cloaked as it is in playfulness and delirium; a legitimate practice of discrimination, where otherwise secret fantasies can be shared aloud.<sup>6</sup>

Festivals, predicated on creating playful, social, intoxicating atmospheres (often through theming that aestheticizes the cultural and natural world of the host area) reveal exoticism-in-action, even as their immediacy masks the structural circumstances that bring them into being. Festivals profit from a belief in the transformative potential inherent to immersivity that theater scholars like Josephine Machon<sup>7</sup> have explored, seeing the visceral corporeal engagement of participants as a democratizing theatrical language. To travelers, the participatory nature of a festival creates a uniquely interactive immersion in cultural difference; the collective party atmosphere enables affectively intense moments that appear as more intimate, more “authentic” encounters with local people than typically found in curated tourist experiences like resort stays, guided hikes, museums, or cultural expositions.

I begin by locating Envision within cross currents of neoliberal policy that include tourism’s adoption as an apparatus for economic development, the rise of various forms of “ethical” tourism (including within Costa Rica’s eco-tourism industry), and changes to the festival industry that enabled participatory destination events. I particularly outline how destination festivals came to be seen as having moral dimensions, and, through a discussion of Envision’s founding, consider why the mystique of *pura vida* carries particular ethical weight to its transnational community. I then combine my own observations as a participant-observer at the 2015 and 2016 events to provide glimpses into some key activities that take place at the festival, demonstrating how the image of Costa Rican culture and heritage transform into identity capital for participants. I conclude by discussing a protest that took place at Envision in 2016 to examine how the festival’s longitudinal presence in the Costa Ballena region has created fault lines for its local communities. These social divisions and their related economic outcomes regenerate and expand

with each annual festival iteration, demonstrating how subcultural aesthetics solidify into enduring pathways of transnational circulation.

## Destination Travel, Ethics, and Neoliberalism

The rise of destination festivals as prominent components of the global music, event, and tourism industries coincided with the rapid expansion of neoliberalism from the late 1980s through the 1990s. The opening of trade and travel policies across Asia, South and Central America, and Africa created new markets for production companies and entrepreneurs. Concurrently, travel was facilitated by deregulation, the integration of world credit systems, more relaxed visa policies (at least for wealth- and race-privileged citizens of economically developed countries), and the advent of web-based advertising and communication. Festival organizers found it increasingly feasible to obtain the permits, licenses, and venues for large-scale international gatherings, and they could rely on citizens from the Global North being consistently able to obtain the necessary visas to attend.<sup>8</sup> Tourism was one way in which the citizens of economically developed nations could leverage their prosperity on a global scale, and conversely, it offered developing nations ways to generate income through the use of existing resources like nature or culture (to the extent these can be simply instrumentalized as resources), rather than capital. Supranational institutions like UNESCO, the IMF, and the World Bank began to promote tourism as a vehicle for sustainable development and structural adjustment, with UNESCO’s 1982 World Conference on Cultural Policies laying the foundation for these initiatives.<sup>9</sup>

As international travel became more widely available, it also became increasingly stratified as wealthier groups sought alternatives to traditional mass tourism experiences. One way this stratification occurred was through a phenomenon that Jim Butcher calls the “moralization of tourism,” a transformation in which tourism providers responded to growing awareness of the environmental and cultural damage caused by mass travel by creating more niche travel experiences that were “justified less in terms of the desires of the consumer and more from the perspective of its perceived benign influence on the natural world and on the culture of the host.” Tourism providers marketed numerous forms of “ethical,” “moral,” or “responsible” travel—“tourism with a mission.” This was also predicated on creating social capital for travelers by reframing the visit to a foreign space as a chance to demonstrate the

tourist's enlightenment, respect for diverse ways of life, and "critical reflection on [their] own developed society."<sup>10</sup> Indeed, reflecting a primitivist escapism from what Durkheim called the "spiritual anomie"<sup>11</sup> of modern society, *Envision* promotes itself as "conscious travel," a psychedelic immersion in tropical paradise that "reconnects you to the raw force of nature that awakes your inner wild."<sup>12</sup> The rise of moral tourism created niche travel experiences—typically more expensive than mass tourism options—which were imbued as a rarefied mode of cosmopolitan engagement, a progressive form of consumption, travel with distinction.

A form of this phenomenon embraced on a nationwide level in Costa Rica was "sustainable" tourism, which argued for a pivot to practices that prioritized environmental conservation and forms of cultural protection. This built on the country's long-term focus on ecology in its tourism strategy. In 1955 the nation established the Instituto Costarricense de Turismo (ICT), a government agency given significant credit for creating forward-thinking policies to emphasize the nation's biodiversity, promote it as a land of natural beauty, build sustainable practices, and create protections for Indigenous groups. Some of its initiatives include a certification program for sustainable tourism, its Blue Flag awards promoting environmental education, waste management, and conservation efforts, and its sponsoring of Indigenous tourism programs like *Raíces*, which uses tourism to promote: "cultural rescue and learning of a harmonious relationship with nature."<sup>13</sup>

Although Costa Rica's proactively conservationist approach anticipated some of the recent shifts in global environmental politics, it was also the product of the country's unique economic challenges as it entered the global system. As Megan Rivers-Moore has pointed out, the growth of Costa Rica's ecotourism sector was part of a larger neoliberal transformation that ceded local ecological decision-making to foreign actors:

Costa Rica's conservation efforts have a long history of foreign involvement. The funding for most of its national parks came from external sources, such as conservation organizations, bilateral aid and the Global Environmental Facility of the World Bank. In one of the best examples of what could be termed 'eco structural adjustment,' the shift in the 1980s towards promoting national parks and ecotourism was also encouraged by debt-for-nature swaps, whereby some of Costa Rica's debt was forgiven in exchange for environmental conservation. New attitudes in the North with regard to the importance of environmentalism and conservation therefore became conditions upon which Costa Rica's foreign loans and aid were based.<sup>14</sup>

Rivers-Moore and Michelle Christian have also argued that these dynamics had racialized dimensions that mapped to US global hegemony, as well as a particular Costa Rican narrative of white settlement. They argue, for instance, that the 2011 ICT campaign entitled “No Artificial Ingredients,” prioritized Spanish heritage and whiteness in its promotional materials, in order to more closely align Costa Rica with the US and Europe instead of its Latin American neighbors. The campaign, aimed at North American markets, presented the multiracial context of Costa Rica in contradictory terms, as “the site of exotic, lush landscapes occupied by exotic, wild people that is also ultimately a safe landscape of domesticated, unthreatening populations.”<sup>15</sup> It playfully bridged Costa Rica’s pristine environment with bourgeois eco-conscious articulations of “clean living,” and did so by frequently overrepresenting parts of Costa Rica populated by light-skinned people.<sup>16</sup>

The ICT was undoubtedly successful at using sustainable tourism to generate a massive influx of travelers and developers from wealthy nations, and its ability to do so positioned its tourism sector favorably vis-à-vis other Central American countries. One consequence of this strategy was the development of a national image that at once presented Costa Rica as exotic, but also domesticated. This double-move proved to be a unique draw, and as environmental issues became more central to youth politics, Costa Rica’s reputation grew as a place to not only enjoy the sun and sand, but also to absorb a progressive sensibility.

## Building a Conscious Festival

Another product of neoliberalism was the massive growth of the live event industry, which relied on ease of mobility and low-cost production technology aided by globalized trade. The 1990s witnessed an explosion of festival culture in North America and Europe, which led to a broad variety of events and niche communities dedicated to particular music genres, creative styles, and political dispositions. As Roxy Robinson has argued, from the end of the 1990s a saturated marketplace led promoters to pivot away from large mega-concerts geared to general audiences toward smaller, more participant-driven event models. Production companies moved away from big-name headliners, instead investing in themed event production tailored to reliable niche communities whose enthusiasm to contribute to the overall aesthetic (through costumes, decorated campsites, self-organized activities, etc.) would add value to the experience at no additional cost to the producer.<sup>17</sup>

Organizers increasingly sought out unique event themes and added collaborative activities from live painting to yoga workshops to cultural lectures. Eco-consciousness emerged as a major discourse in many events, providing a malleable theme for event production in different geographic areas; this reflected both a generational recentering of environmental consciousness, as well as a natural aesthetic disposition (since events tended to be held outdoor in natural settings). Eco-consciousness and permaculture became touchstones for what Graham St. John labeled a “global raving counter-culture,” a transnationally mobile community from wealthy countries that saw the aesthetically intense atmosphere of raves and parties as a profound means of cross-cultural connection with a positive social message.<sup>18</sup>

The idea for Envision began in 2010 at the confluence of these trends. It started as an elaborate wedding celebration for a group of expatriates living in the small surfing town of Dominical. Stephen Brooks, Sarah Wu, Justin Brothers, Josh Wendel, and Brendan Jaffer had been part of the US West Coast music scene and were long-time Burning Man participants. They brought numerous EDM artists to town and drew some 600–800 people to the initial event. In an interview I conducted with Jaffer, he emphasized that the original intention was twofold: to introduce friends from the US to the eco-conscious culture Costa Rica had to offer, and to bring the EDM subculture to Costa Ricans. Jaffer believed Costa Rica offered something special in terms of lush natural settings that could fuel distinctive jungle-themed events, and he emphasized how the country’s progressive national policies (such as its lack of a military, its goal of being 100% reliant on renewable energy, and its “forward-thinking” legislation on personal rights) resonated with the young, progressive subculture. He further believed that the money international travelers could bring into the region might help develop local businesses, many of whom he had come to know through his years of working in sustainable construction.<sup>19</sup>

Envision officially began in 2011 as a 3-day event, run as a legal liability corporation by an executive team composed primarily of US expatriates and Costa Ricans. After venue moves in 2012 and 2014, organizers settled on its current location at a privately-owned wildlife refuge called Rancho La Merced, close to the tiny village of Uvita (population c. 1500). Envision continued to grow, and since 2016 it has regularly sold out, with 5000–7000 people attending—80–85% of them foreigners. When I attended in 2016, 4-day general admission tickets ran around \$300, with a reduced price of \$160 for Costa Ricans. In 2020, Envision was fortunate to conclude just days

before global Covid-19 lockdowns canceled festivals worldwide (indeed, several attendees who stayed in Costa Rica after the event concluded found themselves temporarily stuck there). After going on hiatus in 2021 and 2022, Envision roared back to life in 2023 and 2024, expanding to a week-long event with tickets costing over \$600. As Envision continued year after year, it expanded its presence in the local region through curating various pre- and post-festival experiences, and through inspiring additional events in the local EDM scene, like the Bamboo Bass Festival and Jungle Jam held in Jacó. Constructing Envision’s festival grounds takes around two months, and it has become something of an event unto itself for the army of volunteers (many of them foreigners or young Costa Ricans from urban centers) who come early just to be part of the scene. Many of them stay in Uvita and Dominical during this time, which has led to sustained income for businesses there that cater to the Envision community, like the Danyasa Yoga Retreat, the Cool Vibes Beach Hostel, or the Fuego Craft Brewery.

Envision is often discussed as a “Transformational Festival,” a cohort of events that includes Boom Festival (Portugal), Burning Man and Lightning in a Bottle (USA), Shambala (Canada), Rainbow Serpent (Australia), AfriKaBurn (South Africa), and many others throughout the world. Defining features of these events include: an ecstatic core ritual provided by electronic dance music; performance, art installations, and live painting, as well as a workshop curriculum; the creation and honoring of sacred space; the integration of ceremony and ritual; the cultivation of a social economy of artisans and vendors (or, alternative gift economy); and a multi-day duration in a natural, outdoor setting to honor the Earth.<sup>20</sup> Transformational Festivals feature eco-consciousness as a broader aesthetic disposition that inspires their art, music, architecture, and style.

Although Transformational Festivals generally utilize for-profit event models, they also greatly emphasize organizational ethics. In Envision’s case, this includes a mission statement and list of “Pillars” (Sustainability, Health, Movement, Education, Art, Music, Spirituality) that tie its repertoires of festival activity to personal and social transformation. It also includes the sponsorship of a nonprofit foundation, *Somos El Cambio* (“We Are the Change”), which funnels a portion of festival income into local community projects and environmental initiatives; some of its accomplishments include: planting nearly 100,000 trees across the country, donating equipment to local hospitals and food banks, upgrading the local water system, and constructing monkey bridges and other wildlife improvements.<sup>21</sup> In addition to providing

lectures and workshops focused on environmental subjects, Envision utilizes carbon offsets, biodiesel generators, and volunteer programs for cleaning local beaches and forests; it also requires participants to sort their own material waste, utilize compost toilets, reuse their dishes, and cut down on single-use garbage. In 2018, Envision won the title of “Outstanding Green Event” from the *FestX Awards*, and its eco-conscious practices have been recognized by sources as varied as *Lonely Planet*, the *Costa Rican Times*, and subcultural websites like *Live for Live Music*.

It is difficult to square Envision’s commitment to environmental stewardship and consciousness-raising with its incentives as a for-profit event, its massive and power-intensive event production, and its indirect carbon footprint (vis-à-vis transnational participants’ air travel to enter Costa Rica). But we should be wary of viewing such initiatives as cynical ploys infelicitously appropriating the environmental politics du jour. Envision’s ecological focus earnestly permeates every facet of the event, and its workshops and lectures cover a range of technical and cultural subjects that can rarely be found outside institutions of higher education—some from the 2023 event include “Decolonizing Permaculture,” “Embodying Postcapitalism,” “Indigenous Survival,” and “Tools for Community Self-Governance.” If Envision is a profitable festival, it is not because it selectively chooses to implement a few strategic initiatives as window-dressing for a self-indulgent rave, but rather, because it has recognized that a niche transnational community focused on eco-conscious values actually exists. It is through the festival’s theatrical practices that these values transform into identity capital for participants; this occurs particularly through embodied repertoires that pinion a particular spiritual dimension to Costa Rican land and people, a fetishizing operation that particularly involves Indigenous heritage.

### *Pura Vida* as Popontology: Indigeneity and Appropriation in Festival Aesthetics

As demonstrated by the “The Pura Vida Effect” video ad discussed in the chapter’s introduction, organizers prime potential participants to see Envision as a form of conscious travel by creating an aesthetic vocabulary wherein idiosyncratic festive performances (like drum circles, ecstatic dancing, and oceanside yoga sessions) appear as paths to personal enlightenment via intimate contact with a Costa Rican essence. This occurs through reanimating

imperial tropes that frame Indigenous people and cultural practices as “close to the land” and far from the psychic baggage of modernity. Envision becomes a space where participants can escape from everyday life and immerse themselves in an image of absolute difference—all the more powerful due to the physical copresence of land and local people that seem to confirm this more enlightened, less compromised, way of being.

This is a racialized operation, a generic and essentially commercialized production of Indigenous spirituality that Elizabeth Povinelli refers to as “popontology.” By this she means a popular and quasi-fictional mode of representing unalienated forms of spiritual Being, usually derived from interactions with Indigenous cultures, which permeates enterprises like eco-, cultural, or spiritual tourism. Popontology names the representational apparatuses (textual and embodied) that project a generic spiritual air onto certain communities, which creates a market architecture wherein surplus value can be extracted by those located outside the community.<sup>22</sup>

This popontology can be seen in Envision’s curated media presence, but also in travelogues and event reviews written by participants. Many of these reviews utilize a narrative form wherein we follow participants as they awaken to a new mode of Being through their Costa Rican journey. One travelogue, for instance, explicitly discusses *Pura Vida*, tying it to ethical and social aspirations activated by festival repertoires:

From where I danced, [Envision’s] focused mission was clear: to honor the people, their collective inspiration, consciousness and the spirit of collaboration at the core of Envision. We rallied around a common understanding, based on the most basic and endearing tenets of humankind: community and togetherness—a state of being that knows no barriers, artistic, linguistic nor cultural. *Pura Vida!*<sup>23</sup>

A wide range of video essays, memes, and social media express such thoughts in audio-visual form, anchoring the spiritual aesthetic to particular festival repertoires.

One noteworthy example is a web video published by *VICE* titled “The Craziest Hippie Festival in the Jungle.” In the video we follow Amelia Dimoldenberg, a white British reporter (and comedian, who years later would gain fame as the host of *Chicken Shop Date*) as she attends Envision for the first time: “journey[ing] deep into the heart of the jungles of Costa Rica, and my inner self.” Over the course of the sixteen-minute video, Dimoldenberg

describes transforming from an incredulous wallflower to an extroverted and “conscious” festival convert. She meets friends—whom she calls “spirit guides”—that help her come out of her shell, and she eventually lets loose as a lute-playing artist lost in wild ecstasy during one of Envision’s iconic sundown beach jams. Deploying her signature deadpan, tongue-in-cheek style, Dimoldenberg articulates the results of her trip to the festival in terms of a profound personal transformation. She describes the Costa Rican ecology enabling her to overcome an inherent “awkwardness” that she ascribes to her national heritage: “I felt the first awkward cobwebs of my Britishness blow away into the pure Uvita sunset.”<sup>24</sup> While Dimoldenberg’s ambivalent delivery style leaves us unsure whether she is serious about feeling *transformed* by these crazy hippies in the jungle, the documentary demonstrates her attentiveness to the logic of how Envision’s popontology operates: production is used to imbue Costa Rican space with a pre-modern sensibility, a primal mystique, pure life, *pura vida*; immersing oneself in this space leads to positive self-actualization; and this is all enabled through the community and its repertoires of participatory culture.

What exactly does this look like on the festival grounds? Though it is impossible to speak comprehensively to all the various forms of performance present at Envision, I will discuss a few key facets that I witnessed while in attendance. These are practices one could reasonably expect most 2015 and 2016 festival attendees to have seen, and which make visible a popontological dimension of event repertoires; they map the event’s overall art direction and participatory culture, which get replicated through innumerable person-to-person micropractices throughout the event space.

Let me first discuss performances that took place at a staging area called the Sacred Fire, a space curated by festival producers, which was located away from the various music stages. The Sacred Fire functioned as a calming area, a site where various groups of participants would continuously enact communal rituals throughout the course of the event. The Fire gets lit at the beginning of the festival and tended for the duration; certain volunteer groups were tasked with maintaining the space and building spiritual spectacles and participatory meditative activities. In contrast to the wild ecstasy of the music stages, the Sacred Fire was a place for quiet forms of intense spiritual experience, which were intended to build intimate connections between participants and the land itself.

The rituals that take place at the Sacred Fire are grounded in New Age modes of spirituality, which sometimes draw from Costa Rican land and

Indigenous history, but also liberally borrow from spiritual systems throughout the world. It is a porous space that is meant to invite constant, but elective forms of participation. When I attended, people would stroll in to ground themselves—sometimes during drug peaks or comedowns—stay for a brief spell to rhythmically chant or intensely embrace other participants, and then wander back off to the bass music thumping in the background. A few were much more deliberate in their engagement, choosing the Sacred Fire as their main site of activity during the festival. The rituals themselves were created by different volunteer groups, and they varied in style and substance—one that I remember appeared as an imitation of Indigenous smudging rituals, where a woman proceeded through different actions like burning sage in the cardinal directions and holding fire in a copper pot while kneeling before a group of young Costa Ricans dressed in flowing capes and colorful headbands. When the initiation concluded, the group gathered in a circle and repeatedly chanted “*fue-go . . . fue-go*” (“fire . . . fire”) while the woman free-style rapped in Spanish between the chants. The 15–20 (mostly white) festivalgoers who were on hand eventually joined in the chant as well. Though it was never really made explicit what the ceremony actually was meant to do (and it’s unclear how many people watching spoke Spanish), the general reaction was an intense hugging and crying from the ritual participants, and a lot of profound nodding from those watching on the fringes. Other Sacred Fire activities were listed as attractions in the festival program. Some include: “Spiritual Healing Songs of the Mexicas” and “Yawanawa Song Teaching Workshop” and “Share Your Sacred Song.” This points to how the Sacred Fire intersperses Indigenous and faux-Indigenous performances, actualizing the popontology. Participants encounter markers of Indigenous “Spirit,” but they also get the chance to “try it on” as a way to consummate the deeper longings attached to their travel experience.

Another dimension of performance at Envision that more directly intersects with the event’s primitivist longings are its selective integration of local Indigenous populations and their cultural icons into festival activities. Since 2014, Envision has invited representatives of the 2000-member Boruca tribe (whose protected reserve is located about an hour east of Envision in the Talamanca Mountains) to lead workshops and perform ceremonies for participants. Workshops have included subjects like mask-making and Boruca cosmology, and each year several members of the tribe perform excerpts from an annual mask festival called the *Juego de los Diablitos* (The Little Devils’ Game), a celebration of the Boruca people’s resistance to Spanish coloniza-

tion. At the end of the performance, tribe members usually invite participants to visit their reserve, which can be a source of income for the community.<sup>25</sup>

In 2014 and 2015 the production for *Envision* utilized Boruca cultural icons in the design of their Main Stage, the Luna Stage. To add to the spectacle, the stage featured a giant sculpture, which served to provide a dominating visual image overlooking the main dance floor. The 2014 stage was created to mimic a Boruca mask, one of the tribe's iconic art forms. In 2015 San Francisco-based designers Tigre Bailando and Ernest "Hoodie" Salinas created "Mama Jaguar," which featured a 30-foot tall jaguar (to reference the Boruca totemic tradition) made from shards of driftwood (to reflect Boruca mask-making techniques). Upon being commissioned by *Envision* to create the stage, Bailando and Salinas met with Boruca elders and artisans at their tribal reserve to "ask permission to make a piece that was based off their tradition and their culture." As Bailando described it: "[T]hey granted us that permission, and it was a beautiful experience of being understood [. . .] that we were trying to honor their culture and not just steal or exploit the culture."<sup>26</sup>

I take Bailando at his word, but it is important to point out that lending tribal authenticity to tourist activities carries special danger for Indigenous groups. The financial imperatives for Indigenous groups to strategically utilize their culture as a resource grinds against the loss of control required to do so. As Margaret Werry has argued, non-natives can drain heritage of its specificity, historical significance, and symbolic power by placing it in a neoliberal marketplace of consumers detached from the web of cultural associations that sustain community and resistance.<sup>27</sup> "Mama Jaguar" combines its Boruca icons with those of other world spiritual systems, citing Buddhist, Hindu, Pagan, and Egyptian mythical traditions. Though the piece may have been nominally grounded in Borucan imagery, it also refracted those images through a globalized notion of spirituality that reflected the liberalism of its participants. Though the integration of local materials and icons attempted to ground participants in the uniqueness of Costa Rican geography, its cultural syncretism suggested the mutuality of different beliefs and the transcending of geographic and spiritual borders. "Mama Jaguar" may not have been a performance itself, but it was the focal point for innumerable performances created under its affective dominion. A place where people came together for long periods of time to dance, meet new people, and interact with abandon and ecstasy.

A particularly idiosyncratic festival activity that similarly plays within tropes of Indigeneity is the “Free Blue Clay Bath” station, which allows participants to lather themselves in restorative blue clay. Envision’s website advertises the clay as being “native to the rainforest [that] has been used for centuries by the land’s Indigenous [people] as a natural remedy for various body ailments.”<sup>28</sup> The clay has a functional value as an exfoliant, antiseptic, body temperature regulator, sunscreen, and insect repellent; but in a festival space where costumes, theming, and play create a sense of dislocation from the quotidian world, it also has an imaginative dimension that helps augment the jungle aesthetic. Envision’s website notes that, by the end of the festival, “it is common to find yourself surrounded by tribes of beautiful, [*Avatar*]-like mud people.”<sup>29</sup> Easily washed off with water, the blue clay points to a conception of Indigeneity that is not only transferable, but also easily disposable and in service to the production of an enchanting spatial affect.

Participatory activities like the blue clay bath, the Fire Circle, and various forms of local Indigenous involvement performatively enact the popontology scripted by Envision. They utilize Indigenous iconography as part of the aesthetic experience, but also make them tangible through embodied interactions on-site. While some of this iconography does come directly from Boruca culture, it mixes with many other spiritual systems and faux-Indigenous New Age inventions. Envision has continued to lean into its deployment of Indigeneity as a component of festival activities. In 2023, for instance, a featured panel entitled “Tribal Council: Meeting of the Bribri, Boruca, Mexica, & Yawanawa Elders” took place on its final night, leading into the closing ceremony. What began as a form of local outreach and an expression of the festival’s ethical commitment to the region’s specific cultural and historical context has since evolved into a pan-Indigenous event with a hemispheric scope—introducing a potential contradiction between the festival’s expanded ambitions and its initial commitments to regional engagement.

Envision builds its mystique as a conscious festival through manufacturing intimate and affectively intense encounters with local people, land, and spirituality. This creates a feedback loop as participants replicate the organizers’ script in the form of their own travelogues, photo essays, and event reviews, which more broadly circulate the *pura vida* concept as a form of popontology. Envision’s mediascape gets actualized and replicated via the communal performances of the event, and although the event is only temporary, it hints at the more lasting impacts the festival has on the region.

## From Visitation to Transformation

On the penultimate day of Envision in 2016, a protest threatened to disrupt the ecstatic atmosphere inside the campgrounds. A group gathered in the nearby town of Uvita, braving scorching sun to march to the Envision gate. They held signs reading: “*No más Envision*” and “Stop Envision.” Their protest was aimed at what they saw as an emerging subculture and shifting social dynamics in the region—which they broadly articulated as “drugs” and “nudity”—that had been introduced by the annual influx of tourists. Although the protest consisted of only a few dozen people, Envision’s organizers evidently saw the potential for negative publicity and long-term reputational damage to their image predicated on local sustainability. They attempted to appease the protesters by hearing out their concerns and offering fresh fruit and water as a goodwill gesture. But the protesters remained resolute, dismissing the conciliatory offering with the statement, “They’re trying to buy us off, but values have no price.”<sup>30</sup>

The protest exposed a fault line in the local community created by Envision. In addition to challenging the public image of an event predicated on sustainability, it also aimed to disrupt relationships with the local government officials, transportation workers, traders, and businesspeople needed to make Envision function. In the months that followed, festival organizers attempted to mitigate the bad blood by stepping up their initiatives within the local community: they began Casa Envision, a “youth center, for youth empowerment,” by rehabbing an abandoned school in Uvita; they built a water pump in town so that the spike in local users during festival time would not lead to temporary community shortages (as had happened in years past); and they began the nonprofit *Somos el Cambio* (“We Are the Change”) as a social responsibility initiative. These initiatives were highly publicized as an attempt to demonstrate both the organizers’ magnanimity in the face of protest, but also to outline the festival’s value as a permanent fixture in the local area. Although they align with the event’s ethical Pillars, they can also be understood as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives that contribute a nominal portion of profits toward highly visible forms of “giving back”—often utilizing trusted interlocutors with relationships to the corporation itself, and rarely with robust oversight. Such activities are important to the local community, but they operate on the festival’s own terms; desired projects align with infrastructural demands and publicity campaigns needed to make the event appealing to global travelers, but they also help maintain

crucial relationships in the local area as the extractive and transformational dimensions of capitalism take hold.

Envision’s impact in the local area helps us to understand the protesters’ anxiety about the creep of foreign values and capital into the community. The annual flood of tourists to Dominical and Uvita has led to the creation of restaurants, bars, hostels, groceries, outfitters, and a few specialized businesses that speak to the unique lifestyle of transnational travelers. It has indeed brought development to the local area, but this is an uneven development where money flows primarily to businesspeople who cater to the desires of foreign customers bringing infusions of cash during festival season—often at the expense of locals who work there year-round. A significant portion of this seasonal cash also remains with travelers themselves, since many participants look to purchase art and style that resonates on the wider transnational festival scene.

In fact, each year, in the days leading up to Envision the public beachside boardwalk of Dominical, which is lined with humble trading stalls usually selling cheap tropical knick-knacks, burgeon with festival participants who create their own makeshift shops. They plunk gems and jewelry on top of suitcases and line up to hawk their wares before entering the festival (where only paying vendors can legally sell). As one Dominical stall owner named Jorge lamented about the influx: “There are more people here, yeah, but there is also more competition. See all these [traders] on the streets? None of them are from the area. They come here from different parts of the country, from other countries, and they can set up here [for free].” Jorge saw himself at a distinct competitive disadvantage with these out-of-town tourists due to his tenuous mastery of English, and his inability to hail the specific fashion and subcultural sensibilities of the international cohort.<sup>31</sup>

Envision goes to great lengths to cultivate the image that the transnational party it brings to town benefits everyone: for travelers, it is a chance to uniquely immerse themselves in Costa Rica, soaking up not just sun, but also identity capital in the form of eco-consciousness and an unmediated encounter with life itself—*pura vida*. The festival presents itself to the people of Uvita and Dominical as a beneficent institution that not only seeks the involvement of the local community, but also utilizes its profits for the public good. It not only contributes directly to community projects, it also creates a long-term trajectory of economic development in the region under the rubric of a sustainable enterprise.

Envision plays a significant institutional role in Costa Rica’s Costa Ballena

region, shaping its future through the economic activity it generates. Under neoliberal conditions, the festival exemplifies how transnational capital gains influence not through coercion, but through a layered appeal to imperial desire and popontology—merging digital imagery, embodied experience, and commercial exchange. While Envision promotes a vision of sustainable living, this is accompanied by a broader ambition to shape social transformation on its own terms.

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## CHAPTER 3

# The Black Flowers of the Walled City

## *Tourism and the Embodiment of National Heritage in Cartagena*

Henry Castillo

During the 2009 Cartagena International Film Festival (FICCI), I interviewed a director and screenwriter staying at the Sofitel Legend Santa Clara Hotel. Originally a convent in the seventeenth century, this site later served as a charity hospital before becoming one of the most exclusive boutique hotels in Old Town Cartagena. Ancient walls are complemented by colonial balconies and republican halls evoking the glory of the building's distinctive history. An elegant Spanish colonial style portal and eighteenth-century decorative elements adorn the grand main entrance, whereas the verdant central courtyard provides an opportunity to admire beautiful arched cloisters and the original convent well. The sun would set behind the Walled City, ending a scorching Caribbean afternoon filled with heat and stupor.

While waiting for my contact in an idyllic corner of the outdoor bar overlooking a pool area full of loungers and cabanas, I noticed a Black woman dressed in colorful garb carrying a bowl filled with fruit on her head (*palan-gana*). She was walking around the modern, minimalist swimming pool with a welcoming smile on her face as visitors and tourists observed, enjoyed, and took pictures with her. Women like her, known in the vernacular as *Palenqueras*, frequently sell fresh fruit and homemade sweets on the streets and shorelines of the historic district. They are descendants of San Basilio de Palenque (hereafter Palenque),<sup>1</sup> a maroon village 30 miles south of Cartagena which proclaimed independence from the Spanish colonial order in the seventeenth century. Perhaps in recognition of her historic significance, the luxurious hotel had hired the woman as an embodiment of its motto: "where heritage meets modernity." Her striking appearance, however, would

make her seem more than just a colonial relic. She had a past, a present and a future that I could recognize, sense, and fear. Who created her and why does she persist?

The *Palenquera* signifies Colombia's colonial past often through racist and misogynistic stereotypes seen in the media. Her marketable image is widely admired and spread not only in Cartagena but throughout the country. Her portrayal depicts African cultural identity as a transnational celebration of racial Blackness. I argue that the iconic image of the *Palenquera* is a symbol that generates value through interactions among tourism industry agents who have contributed to her creation (e.g., hotels, cruise lines, tourism agencies and the like). Her everyday presence highlights not only the lasting influence of a colonial past shaped by slavery but also the gendered and racialized foundations of a nation built on *mestizaje*, a race-mixing project in Latin America based on biological and cultural factors. The visual representations of the *Palenquera* telegraphs Colombia's desire to legitimize its transformation from a nation of single-mixed racial citizens (*mestizos*) into a pluralistic, multicultural society as enacted in its 1991 Constitution. The figure serves as a locus for exploring how material and visual culture can contribute to ways of knowing the past that create friction with the strategies underpinning many of the nation's sociopolitical and historical narratives. The *Palenquera* highlights how the state's investment in a global heritage tourism market exploits Afro identities in the country for the sake of sustainable socio-economic development, while also challenging state notions of a pluriethnic and multicultural nation.

In what follows, I trace the history, appearance, and invention of the iconic figure of the *Palenquera*. Using a method that Joseph Roach refers to as "genealogy of performance," I examine how the body remembers, evokes, and represents history and memory.<sup>2</sup> A genealogy of these "counter-memories" reveals "the disparities between history as it is discursively transmitted and memory as it is publicly enacted by the bodies that bear its consequences." Yet, my interest in performance arises less from the fact that my subjects of study embody culture, but rather from Diana Taylor's assertion that their performative dimensions extend beyond their signification and meaning to encompass what they *do* within the social contexts in which they exist.<sup>3</sup>

The late 2000s marked a critical moment in Colombia's decades-long conflict between the state, leftist guerrilla groups ELN (National Liberation Army), FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), and right-wing paramilitary groups with ties to the government. The communist guerrillas



Figure 3.1. A woman working as a *Palenquera* in the Walled City of Cartagena. Photo: © Alfonso Farias / Adobe Stock.

turned against the government after being excluded from a power-sharing arrangement. Violence and terror affected the general population, which consequently had an adverse effect on Colombia's potential to develop tourism as a sustainable strategy for economic recovery. This legacy led the U.S. Department of State to issue several warnings against visiting the country, while Amnesty International condemned Colombia for violating human rights. Then-President Álvaro Uribe used aggressive and controversial measures to bring order to society and end the conflict, which was motivated in part by the ambition of making the country safer for foreign tourists.<sup>4</sup> During the following years, Colombia saw a huge increase in international travelers. As more and more countries lowered their travel warnings, the tourism sector grew into the country's third-largest export industry.<sup>5</sup>

The late 2000s also marked a pivotal moment for the country in relation to the construction of national narratives around multiculturalism using what George Yúdice calls “culture-as-resource”; in other words, culture may be managed and invested in the same way as natural resources are managed in the modern era of globalized capitalism: as an expedient value that a series of actors can use for sociopolitical and economic purposes.<sup>6</sup> One example is the inscription of Palenque on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2008, which allowed Colombia to demonstrate its commitment to the effective use of cultural heritage for national development initiatives. Along with fighting poverty and integrating socially marginalized communities, UNESCO’s programs hoped to greatly contribute to the region’s development. Colombia’s constitutionally mandated protection of ethnic, racial, and cultural groups would also be reaffirmed by this inscription.

## Cartagena de Indias

The Spanish established Cartagena as one of their first colonies in South America. Pedro de Heredia, a noble Spanish explorer, founded the city in 1533 as Cartagena de Indias after one of Spain’s most important naval ports on the Mediterranean coast. Throughout the sixteenth century, the city became one of the most significant ports for the Spanish Empire due to its strategic location in the Caribbean, which made it a major trading hub for Latin America. During this period, the town was enriched by an influx of Spanish elites and the slave trade passing through its walls. During the early 1600s, 2000–4000 slaves were brought each year to what is now Colombia, mostly through Cartagena.<sup>7</sup> It was because of this development that Cartagena’s Old Town grew into an historic district and thriving tourist destination, but with significant racial and class divisions. Amid the cobblestone streets of Cartagena, you will find daily scenes of Black poverty alongside ancient churches, high-end clothing boutiques, pop art and street vendors. While many see the city as a symbol of Colombian renewal following years of armed conflict, others see it as a reminder of the racial and class inequalities still evident throughout the country.

The country has relatively successfully promoted Cartagena as a domestic and international tourist destination, despite its violent reputation, especially since its Port, Fortifications, and Group of Monuments were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1984. Foreign travelers view Cartagena as a

preferred tourist destination, despite the high poverty rate of the urban Black population who rely on tourism as a source of employment.<sup>8</sup> Most of the city's economic growth is aimed at the development of tourism, which greatly benefits the region's white elite who own and control this industry. Although tourism has brought more wealth to the city and surrounding areas, it has not necessarily trickled down to the 70 percent of "darker," impoverished residents living below the poverty line.<sup>9</sup> Of the city's approximately 1 million inhabitants, about 60 to 70 percent are people of African descent.<sup>10</sup> The tourist districts are in Cartagena's historic Walled City and on the nearby peninsula of Boca Grande, one of the country's most expensive neighborhoods. Many *Palenqueras* are usually found working as street vendors in these high-end social spaces, selling fruit and handcrafted sweets or doing hair braiding (often for white and mestizo female clients, including both domestic and foreign tourists). These two areas host most of the boutique hotels, casinos, bars and dance clubs.

Cartagena's tourist appeal largely comes from its history, much of which is based on slavery and the plight of Black peoples.<sup>11</sup> An integral part of that history revolves around Palenque as a maroon village, which has often served as a symbol of Afro identity in Colombia. Its founders and descendants are praised for their ability to preserve their cultural memory, social organization, Creole language and ancestor worship. Throughout the country, the term "palenquera/o" is not used in reference to the inhabitants or the descendants of just any *palenque* (maroon community); but instead, almost exclusively to the original maroons who founded the village, whether they now live in Palenque, Cartagena, or other coastal cities.<sup>12</sup> In Cartagena, however, people tend to avoid discussing race, except as a means of degrading the palenqueros or stigmatizing racial others.

## Blackness in Colombia

In the 1980s, various Black political and cultural organizations engaged the Colombian state directly in discussions regarding constitutional reform. The state would begin to recognize the country as a "multicultural" and "pluri-ethnic" nation since its 1991 constitutional reform.<sup>13</sup> Despite these efforts and the international celebrations of Colombia's ethnic diversity recognition, institutionalized racial discrimination has long been a reality in the country. As a result, Blackness remains an elusive concept when it comes

to racial integration. The diversity of people of African descent in Colombia includes those who identify themselves according to the 1991 Constitution as Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal, or Palenquero. The social and political intricacy of Blackness in the country is best understood with the help of these categories, which embody the country's cultural, racial, and ethnic makeup. As Elizabeth Cunin notes, *mestizaje* "does not mean 'mixture' of 'hermetic' cultures but rather the negation of the logic of isolation and separation itself, of original purity of cultures in contact."<sup>14</sup> The idea of Blackness in Colombia, especially in Cartagena, is inextricably intertwined with the Black identity of those from Palenque. This is largely attributed to the fact that their customs and traditions carry strong traces of Africanness. They are often represented as the finest portrait of Blackness, and thus, people often use the *palenqueros* as a reference point when attempting to distance themselves from being stereotyped as Black. As such, palenqueros become their "racial other," representing those who are "really Black." In that sense, "Palenqueros are the archetypal *negros*: Blackness is defined in terms of approximation to the Palenquero pole of the racial spectrum."<sup>15</sup> In the palenqueros, Blackness has a stable, if narrow, referent.

As a social construction, Blackness can be identified as invisibility, oppression, fantasy, and as a commodity in Cartagena and elsewhere. Although scholars will easily find significant exceptions to these sweeping generalizations, these patterns reveal distinct arrangements of social power, and neither are mutually exclusive. It is common to find elements of all these patterns interlinking and overlapping within one another. In general, I am interested primarily in Blackness as a commodity, that is, how Black people function as an embodied raw material associated with cultural practices that facilitate aesthetic expression in a consumer culture inherited from colonialism. Blackness has been infused with economic value in the international tourism circuit, passing through a complex process of public redefinition. Thus, the components of Blackness that receive publicity, legitimacy, and authorization are the ones that NGOs, developers, and investors believe will bring maximum market share and minimum controversy. The effort to commodify Blackness in contexts with a great legacy of Black people, such as Cartagena, results in complex compromises between the forces outlined above. Colombia's nationalist ideology of *mestizaje* aims to obscure Blackness, offering Black culture to tourists in Cartagena as a reassuring, unthreatening commodity. Its ties to the history of slavery have been removed, reducing a controversial history to colorful costumes, dance, music, food, and memorabilia. While

these cultural productions have been reframed as folklore and national heritage, they nevertheless exist divorced from their history and current realities of racial inequality. Although the openness of Cartagena's Blackness enabled a rediscovery of Colombia's African past, this led Palenque to celebrate its history as a maroon community and reinforced "the indiscriminate use of the body for pleasure, profit, and punishment."<sup>16</sup>

### The *Unofficial* Cultural Heritage of the *Palenquera*

There are several specific debates I orient in these pages. Among them is the notion that "[t]here is, really, no such thing as heritage."<sup>17</sup> In the process of cultural production, heritage does not exist as an object, but rather as a social creation that legitimizes certain identities and experiences. Public and professionals alike perceive heritage as being preoccupied with the idea of risks, with only minimal or no attention given to the deconstruction of this concept—likely the product of blurring boundaries between the language of fundraising and that of heritage preservation as unintellectual discourse. Ever since the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention on the definition, management, and safeguarding of natural and cultural heritage resources, scholars have questioned the value of heritage and its role in contemporary civilization.<sup>18</sup> It is undeniable that societies of all cultures have preserved ancient structures, customs, and traditions throughout history. Modern Western societies, however, have developed this recognition and reverence into an active historical form of representation, into a deliberate doctrine, a discourse.

The shift from the monumental to the personal within cultural heritage is an important distinction that separates physical objects from cultural practices. Not only do people maintain their cultural practices, they can also transmit those practices to future generations. They are invisible or "intangible" like oral tradition or rituals. Both cultural practices and monuments are important as "heritage" because this is often how societies remember and create an understanding of themselves. Whatever the extent of heritage definition, a distinction must be made between official and unofficial heritage. Officially, heritage results from a process that involves close work between "State Parties" (countries subscribed to the World Heritage Convention to protect its natural and cultural heritage) and intragovernmental organizations like UNESCO, which differentiates between tangible, intangible, and natural heritage.

As a social construction, heritage serves to maintain continuity of the past and is thus seen as a marker of modernity. An inscription on the World Heritage List thus confers national and international recognition. An agreement between UNESCO and a designated country facilitates access to financial assistance, thereby improving community awareness, tourism revenue, and economic development.<sup>19</sup> However, it is through heritage that social agents and cultural stakeholders become aware of these political and economic implications. The need to incorporate cultural values into consumer goods, tourist packages, and brands that are ready for advertisement, retail sale, and consumption illustrates how heritage operates. Heritage questions how institutions manage it by showing its very unstable nature.

It is evident from the history of Black women from Palenque that tourism turns customs and traditions into products, revealing how heritage and capital interact with culture in the creation. During Palenque's maroon movement against slavery in Colombia, Black women were responsible for guarding the secret paths of liberation through the majestic beauty of their hair. Maroon women from Palenque provided an Underground Railroad for Black liberation in Colombia through their hair. As they braided their hair into fractal patterns encoding free land maps, they wore head wraps to conceal the hidden messages in their hair follicles. Over their head wraps, they wore fruit baskets to camouflage with the rest of the enslaved population.<sup>20</sup>

In becoming a maroon community, Palenque achieved what no other town of its time had accomplished: recognition, cultural autonomy, and self-government despite isolation. Due to Colombia's abolition of slavery in 1851, former slaves became wage earners in a distinct mode of precarity. Palenque did not experience this transition since they were maroons who worked independently as farmers and made a living by trading with nearby communities. However, the village was isolated from the rest of the country and neglected by the government until the late twentieth century. As a result, it became an "off-the-grid" dusty, sweaty roadside village, surrounded by dense rainforest and mountains and with only limited access to state resources or political rights for its residents.

These circumstances prompted Black women around the 1960s to commute from Palenque to Cartagena's crowded streets to make a living from what they had in abundance: fruit. Following African women's tradition of carrying fruit on their heads, they would pack hand-crafted baskets filled with ripe, juicy fruits from the region and sell them on hot days to passing *cartageneros* until their baskets were empty. The historic buildings in

the colonial district were being restored at the time and Cartagena's Walled City was becoming increasingly popular with tourists. The women began to add homemade confections to their baskets and selling fruit and delicacies became a steady source of income. More women commuted daily to the city as they began to earn their living mostly by posing for curious tourists, photographers and journalists. The racialization of Cartagena has unconsciously woven these Black women into the city's history, transforming them into a modern component of its tourist iconography.

As of now, the *Palenqueras* have not been registered as Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO, and no attempt has been made to officially enlist them. Although heritage helps boost tourists' economic growth, the relationship between tourism and heritage, and how tourism identifies and creates heritage, has received scant attention.<sup>21</sup> Tourism can create an environment in which the past is evoked, revised, reenacted, recreated, manufactured, distorted, appropriated, even mocked; values are challenged and inverted, differences disappear, places become destinations, cultural practices and customs turn into performances, and things and people become symbols. Through its value-added activities, the tourism industry contributes to the heritagization process promoted by heritage conservation, preservation and management specialists. A tourism industry can also contribute to UNESCO's endorsement and ratification of "heritage assets" by creating previously nonexistent heritage sites or even (re)casting and displaying existing people in "living style," such as the iconic figure of the *Palenquera*.<sup>22</sup> However, when examining the imagery of the *Palenquera* it is difficult to distinguish between the deliberate performances of willing actors and the behaviors of pedestrians. This "genre error" occurs when someone's life becomes a spectacle, an opportunity for another individual to "view" those at the bottom of society from a comfortable and safe vantage point.<sup>23</sup>

As commonly occurs with ethnic-racial minority groups around the world, heritagization normally implies a dual process: on the one hand, there is a certain level of acculturation typical of any group's integration into national culture; conversely, these cultural and/or racial differences simultaneously get reinforced.<sup>24</sup> That much is clear in the visual representations of the Black women from Palenque, which are constructs emerging from the dominant interpretation of histories and even the present relationship with the "racial other."<sup>25</sup> The visual representations of the *Palenquera* consolidates and circulates a way of seeing race in a way that has been dislocated from her

specific geographical, historical, and cultural context in order to represent peripheral difference.

Over the last few decades, the meaning of Blackness in the region has become tightly bound to the historic figure of the *Palenquera*, who is often celebrated as a strong and independent woman wearing “traditional garb” and maintaining customs originating in Africa. Although the lived realities of these Black women today do not match their historically preserved image from the 1960s as migrant fruit sellers, these women have achieved a degree of cultural importance as a symbol of an autonomous Afro identity. At the same time, their image has also been appropriated and converted into one of the key iconic elements of Cartagena’s tourist scenery. The *Palenquera*, as an image of the female Black body, is an iconic reconstruction that attempts to represent the Black heritage of the nation, and even the history of Cartagena, while serving as a screen on which to project white supremacy.

Cartagena’s tourism industry created the figure of the *Palenquera* as an icon by transforming the quotidian Black female fruit and sweet street vendor into the “other,” and depicting her as a historic figure from the colonial past. The iconography of the *Palenquera* makes use of representations that essentially ascribe her a different time period, and employ this temporal difference as a way to distance her further from the mainstream modern society which has embraced her. Excluded from modernity, the *Palenquera* is therefore portrayed as a “living archive.” In this way, artisans, vendors, promoters and even tourists can distance themselves from the *Palenquera* by implying that she has no continuity, evolution, or living temporality. With any degree of social and cultural integration, the historic signs habitually used to inform the collective identities of ethnic-racial minorities become vulnerable to appropriation, reinterpretation, and (mis)representation by various groups.

Why has the image of the *Palenquera* come to symbolize Blackness and “heritage” within contemporary racialized images of Cartagena? This historic city has become an emblematic icon of Colombia due to its urban renaissance as a major tourism destination. The city has become a key tool in the country’s efforts to project itself as a modern nation. Reinvesting in Cartagena as a colonial heritage site with enhanced meaning and value resulted in its urban renewal. Hence, Cartagena is now considered a cultural capital, with a vital scene of arts, literature, museums, and academic discourse; this, in turn, has been activated by the figure of the *Palenquera*. Tourists are attracted to the city because of its history and those inhabitants who embody that history through various cultural traditions like music and dance, which heavily relies



Figure 3.2. A Colombian stamp circa 1996 issued by the Postal Union of the Americas, Spain, and Portugal (UPAEP). Collection of the author.

on people of African descent and the preservation of particular African culture.<sup>26</sup> Certain “intangible” elements of Afro identity have now been made cultural heritage, thus transforming the Black body into a privileged site of expression, creation, and (mis)representation. In many ways, Cartagena is a city marked by Black corporeality, especially that of the *Palenquera*. If she is made part of the ambiance within a historic city, the *Palenquera* (as “cultural heritage” of that city) merges into this architectural wealth.<sup>27</sup> As a woman I spoke with during one of my visits said, “we are the black flowers of the Walled City.” As such, visual representations of the *Palenquera* are now found on coffee mugs, tapestries, postcards and especially in tourist brochures. There is almost no Cartagena guide or tourist advertising that does not speak or allude to her (figs. 3.2 and 3.3).

This iconography of the *Palenquera* portrays a dark-skinned woman carrying fruit on her head while wearing a long skirt of bright and lively colors, long earrings, large, beaded necklaces and thick bracelets. She is always smiling, which attracts the eye not only to her bright red and thick lips but also to the contrast between her dark skin and white teeth. Through the composition of these elements, an image is created that is supposed to evoke memories of Africa and the African heritage found in Colombia. However, the racialized

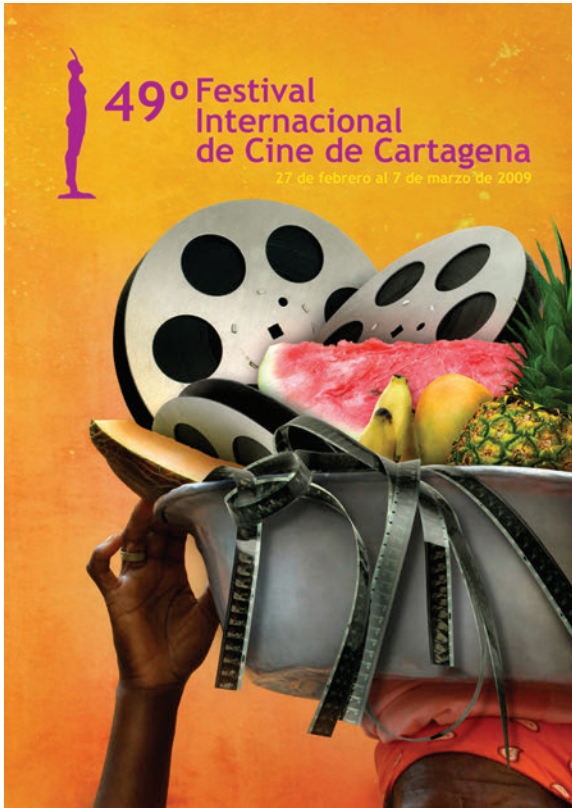


Figure 3.3. Poster for the 49th Cartagena International Film Festival, 2009. Collection of the author.

and gendered images of these healthy and happy Black women with their abundant and delicious fruit and birth-colored garments, are not intended to provoke a questioning of the histories, events, or the places from where these women originate. The racist colonialist discourse that gets reproduced through them seems to overwrite their lived identities since, as Diana Taylor has said: “[n]ative bodies can only be seen or heard from the perspective of the ‘discoverer.’”<sup>28</sup> This colonial discourse often elicits nostalgia for the past, and so the tourist is led to believe that, in Cartagena, things will be as they once were, where Black people are still in their “proper” place.

*Palenquera* iconography displays a colonial racialized heritage reminiscent of Aunt Jemima, a historical figure in the early twentieth century and a prominent stereotype of racial Blackness in the United States. More than once, paper dolls, cookie jars, pitchers and red-painted clay and porcelain

in the shape of the most famous “mammy” filled US homes long after slavery ended. It would be neither surprising nor shocking to find such racial memorabilia in Colombia or the United States. The two countries have similar systems of racial formation, as well as parallel histories of colonialism and slavery, enabling them to produce comparable forms of racialized popular culture. Both the *Palenquera* and Aunt Jemima are material images of Black women wrested from the material context and legacy of slavery. As “mementos,” these references to slavery transform into cultural heritage through consumable products, which we can keep on a shelf or immortalize on postcards. By extending the labor of Black women into a consumable form of popular representation, both representations re-capitalized on Black female labor. For Aunt Jemima, the image was literally multiplied as the brand logo on every box of pancake mix. As M. M. Manring states in *Slaves in a Box*: “ads urged white housewives to have Aunt Jemima, not to be Aunt Jemima.”<sup>29</sup> Those taking pleasure in the iconography of the *Palenquera* in the media could, like housewives buying “slaves in a box,” simultaneously enjoy and disavow her actual relation to slave labor and the work of Black women in maintaining white privilege. The same reason may also explain why contemporary tourists may enjoy taking photos with the *Palenqueras*. By making the connection between the former colonial masters and neo-colonial tourism visible and acceptable, the presence of the *Palenquera* affirms the continuity of white privilege. Almost all traditions take on new dynamics when opened up to the “modern world.” Black women from Palenque hold traditions that have now been incorporated into their performance as manufactured heritage, while their iconic image and role in society have been shaped to meet market expectations and tourist demands. The role delegated to these women within the tourism enterprise has now resulted in a type of public performance where many, aware of the tourism imagery that they embody, consciously play their part to appease the tourists and to make a living. Yet, the proliferation of these visual representations and the social forces that create and preserve them make it difficult for marginalized groups like those from Palenque to transcend their predefined identities and roles. This is in part because “the artists and artisans of intangible and tangible culture lose their freedom to invent, transform, and add to their art in order that it remain recognizable to the tourist, who expects to encounter a known and consumable object or event.”<sup>30</sup> This scenario reveals how the emergence of ethnic identity in Colombia corresponds to the development of national and regional competitions between collective and individual identities against a

multicultural state and the rise of a global identity enterprise. Heritagization highlights the power and politics of defining who is entitled to tell and preserve the story of peoples' pasts and present.

## Racialized Heritage Return

I returned to Cartagena in 2019 with the hope that I would not encounter a similar scene to the one I witnessed at the Sofitel Legend Santa Clara Hotel ten years earlier. My disappointment would grow to learn that what was once considered an ethnoracial curiosity had now been incorporated into the trademark of the city and nation's cultural heritage. After a decade, dozens of her dressed in the colors of the Colombian flag could be found wandering around the Walled City. In some ways, it makes sense that she would accompany the country's economic strategies aimed at promoting foreign investment and restoring the tourism economy undermined by the armed conflict. As Colombia is "for sale" once again, why should the image most closely associated with Cartagena's colonial past be excluded? There is no doubt that this nostalgic reference comes from a nineteenth-century archive. Yet, its ubiquity as neocolonial imaginary contradicts the narratives of a multicultural and pluriethnic nation by reestablishing in the present an open questioning of the past's exploitative economies of gender and race.

Today, women who circulate in Cartagena's historic district as *Palenqueras* must pay a "city tax" to obtain a permit that allows them to walk the streets and shores and request payment for photos, as is the case with many forms of informal economy in the Walled City. However, these women are not part of a scheme to "enhance" visitors' experiences, despite the fact that some cruise lines and hotels employ them in this capacity. Although it can be argued that the *Palenquera* has embraced or affirmed the heritagization of her Afro identity in some sense, "vendors of ethnic authenticity, however bound they may be to the market, are not alienated proletariats, in thrall to the fetish of their own estranged essence. Nor have they simply become fetishes themselves."<sup>31</sup> As a performance, ethno-commerce challenges Bourdieu's notion of "economic" and "cultural capital" as mutually exclusive "when culture is objectified by those who inhabit it."<sup>32</sup> Despite mutual reluctance, these women pay their taxes as *Palenqueras* in recognition of the lucrative nature of acting out tourist fantasies.

One group of six women knew their images were online but could not

easily access the Internet, like many people in Palenque. As I sat with some of these women on a warm day in June 2019, I saw the surprise and irritation of many tourists and photographers. The women's insistence on pay seemed to unveil the constitutive role of the photographer within it. He is also playing his part, and the women know the game. The tourist-photographer has not "stumbled upon" a beautiful street scene. His "captures" of reality have already been shaped by discourse, ideology, and physicality in order to be illustrated or photographed. At the same time, this scenario reveals in one awfully awkward moment the tourist-photographer's own sense of entitlement to occupy the privileged position of the one who sees, but is not seen, as well as the one whose theatrical absence defines the terms of racial privilege and visibility.

The more the figure of the *Palenquera* multiplies, whether as a tourist brochure, novelty souvenir, or as a "living archive" on the streets of Cartagena's Old Town, the less evocative she becomes. Rather than demonstrating continuity with a nostalgic colonial past, she suggests the continuation of widespread racial discrimination in Colombia. Her iconic status allows her to announce that Black women in Colombia remain "for sale." Their commodity value comes from their ability to provide leisure and pleasure to mostly privileged white consumers and conceal their own labor in this production process. The *Palenquera* became a symbol of embodied cultural capital, rather than racialized nostalgia. She indexes an otherwise repressed past, gesturing toward another future. In a raw, contemporary present, this road reinvents the past as cultural heritage. It is likely that in the new racialized and ideological economy, the commodification of the figure of a Black woman, in the name of creating a saleable national heritage, will take on new and virulent forms.

There is a long history of white elites exploiting Black people in the marketplace, and the tourism enterprise in Cartagena is yet another example. The ideology of Blackness as a commodity remains in place and is reenacted at virtually every level of Colombian society. The tourism market demonstrates the perverseness of internalized racist beliefs, particularly with respect to people of African descent. The negative iconography found in different (mis)representations of the *Palenquera* points to the desire of local elites to maintain racial inequalities in the region, which appears to be good for the tourism enterprise. Cartagena's appeal as a tourist destination is the result of its former status as a Spanish colony built on transatlantic slavery, slave trading, and racial oppression; the continuation of ethnic-racial subordination helps preserve that history. It is unsurprising that tourist advertising and imagery

often provide this type of racialization in the representation of Cartagena as a city marked by the Black body. The images of the *Palenquera* are visually appealing to tourists, and they make for a profitable business model. Blackness and Black femininity get enslaved by these representations, which ostensibly stand for emancipation and freedom. The portrayal of these Black women is based on sexist and racially distorted images intended for tourists. Despite engaging in dialogue with historical and aesthetic discourses about the Black imaginary, these aesthetic representations remain a prism through which the anxieties and wishes of the *status quo* are seen and interpreted.

Despite commonly held beliefs in Colombia's racial democracy, Black people have not yet exercised their citizenship rights to the fullest extent, and have not yet enjoyed the benefits of belonging to the nation. Although the *Palenqueras* have vindicated their African roots and achieved a certain level of political recognition, these women have not overcome their status as mere instruments of the tourism enterprise. They still live in difficult and precarious socio-economic conditions, which begs the question of whether one can call poverty heritage? And if heritage is viewed as an economic activity, does heritage development aim to *preserve* poverty in communities? Is poverty a living, intangible heritage to be frozen as a tradition?

The recent celebration of the *Palenquera* in the public eye has not produced radical changes within greater Colombian society. Nor has it resulted in any kind of movement to condemn the treatment of Afro descendants throughout the country. On the contrary, the analysis presented here as part of a much larger study of racialized iconography reveals forces in place that actually uphold older racial hierarchies instead of questioning them. Elisabeth Cunin argues that the aphorism "Black is beautiful" exists as part of a new pluriethnic and multicultural landscape in coastal Colombia, but only within Black people's new role as an ethnic-racial "other," as a symbol of national pride and tourist attraction in a country hoping to clean its conscience and create a new international image.<sup>33</sup> Thus, for the state, "Afro-Colombian" cultural heritage is simply a veiled ideological tool used to conceal racism and to construct the image of a multicultural nation.

## Notes

1. *Palenque*, Spanish for "maroon community," also abbreviates the village's full name: *El Palenque de San Basilio* (Saint Basil's maroon village). Locals shortened their town's name to avoid Catholic-colonial associations. Among all the maroon communities in Colombia, Palenque stands out as the most renowned and studied due to its preservation

of African traditions such as Bantú and Kikongo. Locals refer to themselves as *palenqueros* (men) and *palenqueras* (women), which is how most people throughout the country regard them. I embrace this local position of cultural identity as essential to this writing.

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13. Corte Constitucional de Colombia, *Political Constitution of Colombia*, edited by Constituteproject.org (Bogotá, Colombia: Colombian National Printing, 1991).

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17. Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), 11.

18. See María Fernanda Escallón, *Becoming Heritage: Recognition, Exclusion, and the Politics of Black Cultural Heritage in Colombia. Afro-Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023); Valdimar Tr. Hafstein, *Making Intangible Heritage: El Condor Pasa and Other Stories from UNESCO* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2018); Stuart Hall, "Whose Heritage? Un-Settling 'The Heritage,' Re-imagining the Post-Nation," in *The Heritage Reader*, edited by Graham J. Fairclough, Rodney Harrison,

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## SECTION TWO

### Staged Visits

#### *Making Places Perform*

Margaret Werry

Let me begin with a seemingly simple premise. Visitation is poietic. It has performative force. By this I mean that visitation is not only something performed—the actions and expressions of visitors as well as those visited. It also produces something in the process of that performance. One aspect of that something is *place*.

Tourism theorists have long argued that tourism invents places by furnishing the cultural meanings attached to them.<sup>1</sup> Tourism's lodestar is the destination image: the cluster of ideas, stories, and affects that make a place unique. A product of popular culture as well as concerted marketing, the destination image lures and primes tourists to perceive and experience a locale in a particular way. Tourism providers in turn curate, narrate, and materially manipulate destinations to conform to the destination image. They give tourism sites their scripts (the guide's spiel, the pamphlet with its planned routes and views); their scenography (a dominant architectural style or an arrangement of a view); a repertoire of characters (the cowboy, the beach bum, the happy villager); and implied choreographies (swimming, sipping coffee, strolling and buying). In this way tourism is a tapestry of performances *of* place, and with every visit, tourism patrons endorse and entrench the destination image with their performances *in* place. The photos they take reproduce the prescribed views; their stories star the stock characters; their souvenirs testify to the preferred activities. Tourism's hermeneutic circle is thus complete: the place that tourism represents is the place that tourists experience and *re*-present to other future tourists for them to experience and re-present.<sup>2</sup>

Scratch the surface of this seemingly simple premise, however, and its complexity quickly becomes evident. Tourists may travel to an invented place, but real people live and work in it, and the two are often at odds. This central insight is borne out by the three case studies in this section. Joanna Dee Das describes a theme park in Missouri, Silver Dollar City, which sells a comforting vision of “white, rural, virtuous America.” At the same time, it is populated by urban patrons and performers and owes its origin to the building of a dam nearby, a policy decision that undermined the region’s rural economy while favoring urbanites’ demands for leisure and energy. Gretchen Smith’s American students walk London’s Brick Lane, marketed as a gritty immigrant entrepot saturated with hard-scrabble history. But while they hear stories of poverty, grime, and crime, they stroll past swish boutiques and upscale offices, and shop for on-trend T-shirts to take back to the US. For Susan Tenneriello, the Tokyo summer (2020) and Beijing winter (2022) Olympic opening ceremonies’ images of national unity and global harmony were a gauzy veil concealing the controversial realities behind the contemporary Games: corruption scandals, ethnic divisions, labor exploitation, and rapid urban development.

The annals of tourism are littered with such ironies. To project a fantasy image onto a real locale necessarily elevates one group’s pleasure over another’s lived reality. Through appeals to jobs, civic pride, and a sense of hospitality, tourism blithely mystifies the conditions that allow one people to take their leisure in a place where others labor. It is for this reason that tourism can be so perniciously ideological. As Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o has argued, the “definition, delimitation and regulation of performance space” is a tool of power, and tourism’s place-making is no exception to this rule.<sup>3</sup>

But my purpose in this introduction is not to parrot this well-established argument about the duplicity of tourism’s image-making machine. Instead, I want to propose that there is more to visitation’s poietic power than this capacity to make places serve its ideas, and its ideologies. Even the most commercial, exploitative forms of tourism are not a unilateral imposition of image upon reality. Visitors come with divergent agendas and leave with diverse impressions. Through cumulative acts, a destination can come to resemble its manufactured image; places can equally turn into sites of struggle between competing ideas, motives, or practices. The destination image can take on a life beyond the vision of its imagineers. And visitation can take place in all kinds of ways, many independent of tourism’s spectacle or parasitic upon it, producing their own vernacular spatial imaginaries. Visitation indeed pro-

duces places, but that process is by no means a simple one in which capital's image-makers compel locals to accede to their ideas. Instead, it is an intricate alchemy between projection, people, and place that transforms each in the doing. This is true of all genres of visitation.

The essays in this section offer examples for a typology that illustrates this point. Visitation entails many different spatial practices and produces many different kinds of space that each, in their own way, show this alchemy at work. We could label the four examined in this section: the simulacrum, the enclave, the lived-in city, and the mega-event.

The touristic simulacrum (e.g., a theme park like Silver Dollar City or a heritage replica like London's Globe Theatre) is the epitome of a made-up place. Like the Egyptian pyramids and Italian waterways recreated by Las Vegas casinos in the Nevadan desert, the simulacrum literally fabricates a world. Simulacra can be utopic or atopic—fantasy places that have no relation to their real, physical locus. Silver Dollar City, for instance, is a concatenation of three spatial imaginaries: the US's Western Frontier, its Midwestern Heartland, and the Old South. It represents no real place and could be constructed just about anywhere. But, as Das shows, a simulacrum can also be hypo-topic, conjuring a spirit of place that is elusive until tourism performs it into material being. Silver Dollar City's performances drill into the historical or subconscious bedrock of place by staging vigilante violence as the animating essence of Americana. Staged in a place where lynchings took place only decades earlier, the attraction re-presents violence as wholesome, even comic, family entertainment. That those performances invisibilize the actual historical targets of Ozark vigilantism—largely people of color—only makes them more ideologically powerful. Silver Dollar City is an elaborate, performative assertion of racial innocence simultaneously representing *and* enacting white racial power to capture and dominate space.

The tourist enclave is another classic genre of touristic space, a place where tourism's fantasies have full rein because it has been cordoned off from a locality to prevent workaday realities from intruding. Silver Dollar City's managers conceal contemporary technology to keep the attraction forever frozen in the 1880s, in the same way that the Taj Mahal's curators keep hawkers out so they don't disturb the contemplative experience of the site, or resort hosts hound vendors off tropical beaches to preserve a destination image of unsullied paradise.<sup>4</sup> Yet, as Bryan Schmidt shows us elsewhere in this volume, enclaves have porous boundaries. The transformational festival he examines (Costa Rica's *Envision* festival) may feel like a world unto itself—a program

of performances held behind a (literal) fence for 2 weeks—but its tendrils extend beyond the site and duration of the event into the local community, shaping the local economy, infrastructure, and—some locals fear—its values as well. Philanthropically-minded and eco-conscious festival patrons “give back” to the community by planting trees and donating to hospitals; others indulge in long after-parties at luxury condos, their dollars propping up Costa Rica’s wealthiest expat landowners. Some locals protest the nudity and hedonism of patrons, while others accede to the festival’s foreign influence, with its seasonal tide of bars, hostels, and new-agey knick-knack vendors that transform their towns’ street-life—along with its economy. In tourism, fantasy is not only a vital social practice, but also a material, contested force of place-making.<sup>5</sup>

Even, perhaps especially, those places not consciously manufactured for tourist visitation are transformed by it. When everyday, familiar, and lived-in locales become tourist sights, they also become stages for performances, both intentional and unwitting. Gretchen Smith describes how Brick Lane’s Bengali restaurant workers take up new roles: touting their establishments on the sidewalks, luring the strolling consumer with repartee and gaudy signage, and turning the street into a spectacle. The choreographies of visitors themselves (stopping, staring, clustering, photographing) are as fully part of that street’s performance as the movements of its denizens, like the office workers bustling down the sidewalks, grumpily sidestepping the tourists. As much as Smith’s students might wish to stand apart as ethnographers observing the touristic streetscape, they are not only part of the scene, but also part of its tourism-driven evolution. London, the world’s most visited city, has for centuries been molded to solicit the attention of tourists with its vistas, facades, pleasure gardens, and street performers. Even the “dreadful delights” of its seedier corners have long been packaged as tourist spectacle (as in Brick Lane’s own Jack the Ripper tours).<sup>6</sup> The East End’s current makeover (beginning in the 1990s) as a node in Britain’s cultural, creative economy, is just the latest iteration of that ongoing process. With its clusters of hipster boutiques, dance clubs, advertising, and architecture firms, Brick Lane is morphing into a place to look at, participate in, and purchase cultural commodities. Tourism patronage is one driver of that gentrification. “Our visits,” Gretchen Smith writes, “like the visits of other tourists, are like drops of water . . . we are in our own tiny way one of the agents of change.”

Finally, mega-events, such as the Olympics opening ceremonies examined by Susan Tenneriello, offer an example of touristic place-making on the

grandest scale. In these events an orgy of symbolism and ritual elements perform the ideals of internationalist harmony, cathecting those ideals to a specific destination: the host nation. The ceremony is a stage that spectacularly materializes the host's narrative of nationhood. If a nation is an imagined community (as Benedict Anderson famously argued<sup>7</sup>), the Olympic ceremony imagineers it; it engineers the nation into the form of an image. Visitation is key to this alchemy. Historically, millions of Games patrons would witness and endorse this national vision by making the pilgrimage to the host city. In the case of the Covid-era Olympics that Tenneriello examines, visitation was largely virtual, but its place-making effect was nonetheless powerful. The ceremonies digitally assembled natural icons, national symbols, and live actors at the physical site of the (near-empty) stadium into a seamless performance experience, equally accessible to quarantined audiences around the globe as to those at the destination cities. At the same time, hosting the Olympics—even (or perhaps especially) during a pandemic—is a brutally material process of space-making. For decades, host nations used the Games to super-charge the development of transportation and entertainment infrastructure, security, and communications networks, making visitation possible on a previously unimagined scale. Now the sheer size of the Games makes taking on the Olympics a risk that only the wealthiest of potential hosts can afford. The Olympics now index the inequities of globalization, even as they are rooted in an ideal of international egalitarianism.

From these examples, it is clear that visitation is a terraforming force—a performance *on* place. Its social dynamics calcify into the durable lineaments of location: built forms, business types, traffic patterns, the concentration of wealth in certain populations and properties (and of poverty in others). It is less obvious, but nonetheless evident, that visitation shapes people through their performances *in*, *about*, and *in relation to* place. If tourism is a practice of self-making through congress with other (or Other) places, self-making is in turn a practice of world-making. And, needless to say, the whole process is thoroughly racialized. What kind of citizen, and what kind of nation, is made through touristic pilgrimage to a place (like Silver Dollar City) that normalizes white violence, torture, and vigilantism as patriotic family entertainment? What do Brick Lane's immigrant restaurant workers come to understand about their place in Britain when they must perform their ethnic difference to draw tourist business, in a locale increasingly dominated by a gentrifying, white, cultural economy? And how do tourists, audiences to those performances, participate in putting these people in their place? Finally,

what about national brands, like the Chinese one so spectacularly visualized in the 2022 Winter Games opening ceremony, that enlist ethnic diversity as a selling point (Diverse places! Diverse faces! One nation!) while simultaneously repressing the rights and interests of ethnic minorities? Like a destination image, a national brand works by appealing to spectatorial entitlement: it invites aspirational identification by nationals and admiration by others throughout the world, saying “This could belong to you!”<sup>8</sup> In their enjoyment then, visitors—even virtual visitors—endorse ethnic suppression and shore up majoritarian national identity.

As all these essays illustrate, it is performance analysis that makes visible the alchemical power of visitation, the transformative force it exerts on place and people. It cracks open visitation’s complexity. Visitation is poietic through and through; in visiting and being visited we make selves and worlds. This is why it is one of the most fundamental and widely practiced rites of contemporary life. But only through acute ethnographic attention to embodied doings and meaning-makings through time and in place, to the interplay between the theatrical and the real, the imagined and the lived, can this process be made available to analysis and critique. And only through this kind of critique can the process itself be shaped to new ends.

## Notes

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4. Tim Edensor, *Tourists at the Taj: Performance and Meaning at a Symbolic Site* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

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## CHAPTER 4

# “You’ve Got a Great Past Ahead of You”

### *Performance and American History at Silver Dollar City Theme Park*

Joanna Dee Das

In October 1963, a grandmother prepared to take her three-year-old grandson on a train trip from Springfield, Missouri to Fort Scott, Kansas. She noticed that the boy was “unaccountably worried.” Finally, he came out with it, “Granny, will I get shot?” he asked anxiously. “No, they don’t shoot people on the train,” she assured him, wondering where in the world he had gotten such an idea. “They do down at Silver Dollar City,” he replied promptly.<sup>1</sup>

The toddler was not wrong. At “one of God’s Country’s major tourist attractions,”<sup>2</sup> murderous thieves held up the Frisco Line train multiple times daily. Of course, the robbery was a staged performance. The would-be robbers wielded real guns, heightening the realistic effect, but loaded them with blanks. They also completely bungled the job with comedic incompetence, so that everyone successfully escaped harm—though not before many errant shots rang out. Such performances happened throughout the Silver Dollar City theme park (SDC), which opened in 1960 in the Ozark Mountains of southwest Missouri near the city of Branson. SDC advertised that it was modeled after an 1880s village, Marmaros, that had previously existed on the site. Marmaros had sprung up in 1885 to house laborers working in a nearby cave to extract bat guano, and it was abandoned four years later when extraction was complete. SDC did not reference this industry in its reimagination of that era. The modest Main Street instead had a General Store, hotel, print shop, blacksmith shop, and candy shop, with a church and homestead off to the side. Visitors could interact with employees, called “Citizens,” and purchase items for sale. Over the decades, the park expanded to include more craft

shops, a train, an outdoor amphitheater, restaurants, and roller coaster rides. Despite such expansion, live encounters with employees have remained a primary attraction.

Drawing on the work of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Jane Desmond, and Bethanee Bemis, I understand live performance at theme parks to be vitally important to the transmission of cultural values and knowledge, especially about the past. Situated on the ruins of an 1880s village in an economically impoverished region of the United States, Silver Dollar City fits perfectly into Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's definition of a heritage tourism site: a place that "depends on display to give dying economies and dead sites a second life as exhibitions of themselves."<sup>3</sup> SDC is more profitable than the guano extraction economy ever was. While tourists obviously understand the theme park to be fake, the Citizen-performers (many of whom are Ozarks locals) in their 1880s garb and real rifles imbue the site with a sense of authenticity and liveness of the past. As Desmond notes, there endures the "intractability of the notion of the 'body' as that which is really 'real.'"<sup>4</sup>

This essay examines how SDC and its Citizen-performers have contributed to a hegemonic understanding of American history. The main narrative arc is that Christian, white settlers valiantly battled the wilderness to build a great democracy, one westward step at a time. This narrative is not new or surprising; in fact, it is rather cliché and repeated at other theme parks—Frontierland at Disneyland Park being the most obvious example. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Steve Fjellman derisively call it "Distory," (a mashup of Disney and history), or "history as it should have happened—the best, only the best, nothing but the best,"<sup>5</sup> which they implicitly contrast to a truer, more complex history. But academic scholarship offers its own problems: Michel-Ralph Troillot, in *Silencing the Past*, argues that the term *history* is fundamentally ambiguous, representing both "an irreducible distinction and yet an equally irreducible overlap between what happened and that which is said to have happened."<sup>6</sup> SDC selectively chooses its facts and its narrative frame, but so do academic tomes. Rather than posit theme park history as false and professional history as true, I follow the lead of Bemis, who argues that Disney theme parks are "a space to negotiate how Americans have understood and want to understand history."<sup>7</sup> While the white pioneer narrative is not surprising, its endurance despite decades of critiques by academics, political activists, and people of color *is* surprising. We cannot understand that durability unless we understand the importance of places like Silver Dollar City, where pleasurable experiences with performers, in a

geographic and physical setting that reinforces those pleasures, makes the white pioneer narrative feel desirable and worth defending.

While SDC continues to thrive today (in 2023 it ranked #1 in *USA Today’s* “Top Ten Theme Parks”),<sup>8</sup> this essay focuses on its first fifteen years of existence, when it cemented the white pioneer image. I first situate how and why SDC found a place in America’s tourism economy in the mid-twentieth century. I coin the term “geographic code-switching” to argue that SDC brilliantly toggles between depicting itself as Western, Southern, and Midwestern to capture the widest imaginary of what constitutes America’s Heartland. Disneyland in California and Disney World in Florida may receive millions more visitors, but SDC’s geographic location has given it an important kind of authority in claiming to represent “real” America, past and present. I then examine the role of live performance in SDC’s depiction of the American past to explain the park’s emotional power. Finally, I focus on SDC’s performances of violence to understand how it rebuffs one of the most pointed critiques of Distory: that theme park histories erase the violence of the past. While that may be true at Disney properties, Silver Dollar City leans into violence but employs multiple performance strategies to render it family-friendly, justifiable, and central to the American story.

## Silver Dollar City in National Context

In 1958, a widow named Mary Herschend and her two sons were busy running Marvel Cave, a modestly-successful tourist attraction in Stone County, Missouri when a carnie named Russell Pearson rolled into town. He suggested they create an Ozarks version of the “Frontier City” theme park he had recently built in Oklahoma in order to expand their business.<sup>9</sup> The idea resonated, as Mary’s husband Hugo had once dreamed of opening a crafts market at the entrance to the cave before he died suddenly of a heart attack. The timing was also perfect. Leisure travel exploded in the late 1950s, bolstered by a booming economy and President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s interstate highway system. Missouri was one of the first three states to sign contracts for the construction of these national freeways in 1956.<sup>10</sup> Rural folks and their urbanized or suburbanized descendants now had discretionary funds, vacation time, cars, expansive roadways, and the desire for experiences. While the area had long been a destination for fishing and boating enthusiasts, the construction of a federally funded dam by the US Army Corps of Engineers

in 1958 widened the possibilities. Table Rock Dam, and the lake created by it, made entertainment more possible by providing electricity and controlling flooding, even as it forced numerous small farmers off their land. In essence, the dam and lake decimated local rural life and enabled a tourist trade explicitly built on a *performance* of the rural way of life.<sup>11</sup>

Silver Dollar City was also an ideological fit with the early 1960s. For people seeking refuge in a vision of white, rural, virtuous America, the Ozarks were the ideal place to vacation. It combined two treasured cultural ideas: the frontier and the folk. Frontier motifs were all the rage in the United States in the mid-twentieth century. Western films and television shows were at the height of their popularity. The frontier myth had crystallized in Chicago in 1893, when historian Frederick Jackson Turner gave a speech to the American Historical Association down the street from Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. As Buffalo Bill performed his vision of the American frontier as a place of fierce battle between Native American "savages" and valiant white American scouts, Turner stood at a podium to declare his own Frontier Thesis: that the history of the United States was one of a continuously-westward-moving frontier line of white settlers conquering a mostly unpopulated wilderness. According to Turner, the frontier promoted democracy and individualism as well as other traits such as pragmatism, materialism, expediency, and optimism. Most importantly, because the availability of free or very cheap land on the frontier allowed for a pioneer to remake himself or his fortune, America symbolized opportunity. Unfortunately, the US Census Bureau had declared in 1890 that the frontier was no more, and thus Turner claimed that Americans had to search for new ways to keep their national traits alive.<sup>12</sup>

Except, maybe they didn't. What if the frontier was not closed? In the 1930s and 1940s, folklorists Vance Randolph and Otto Rayburn designated the Ozarks as an "arrested frontier." They proposed that the Ozarks had been skipped over in Turner's stages of frontier development. It remained isolated and rugged—and therefore also, presumably, a fount of democratic ideals.<sup>13</sup> The hills were a holdout of what Randolph called "primitive society," white men living in symbiosis with the wilderness, who had never developed modern economic or civilizational structures. While that description carried connotations of backwardness, Randolph and Rayburn championed the Ozarks as the place one could still find "real Americans" because of this extant frontier spirit. And unlike Turner, who described frontier zones as places of racial and ethnic mixing, these Ozark boosters explicitly defined real Americans as Anglo-Saxon. Rayburn even proclaimed that the region was "the last survival of Elizabethan culture in the Western world."<sup>14</sup>

But Western was not the only way to understand the Ozarks; the region could geographically code switch to be Southern or Midwestern. Silver Dollar City was a mere seventy-five miles from the midpoint of the United States population.<sup>15</sup> Near the borders of Arkansas, Kansas, and Oklahoma, the site could fulfill three different visions of "Heartland" America. The three visions had the common denominator of imagining the Heartland as rural and white, even if, in reality, all three regions contained urban centers and racially diverse populations.

The Ozarks' Southern identity was particularly strong. Writers have often lumped Appalachia and the Ozarks together as the Southern Mountain region, with a homogeneous demographic of poor whites.<sup>16</sup> But the two areas have important distinctions. In the late nineteenth century, Appalachia had become a site of academic inquiry, progressive missionary zeal, and capitalist speculation. Strip mining transformed its communities, which in turn led folklorists and reformers to rush to save what they deemed as essential American heritage: folk songs, square dances, and crafts of Anglo-Saxon- and Scotch-Irish-descended mountaineers. The Ozarks region was similarly understood as a site of pure white racial heritage, but was not "discovered" until the 1930s, and, most importantly, without the urgent need for intervention. Northeastern capital and the most conspicuous changes wrought by industrialization had not yet penetrated there. That gave the region its Western frontier flavor.

The gap between the perception of Appalachia and the Ozarks widened in subsequent decades. The 1960 Democratic primary brought attention to Appalachia's economic distress, which soon became a "cause célèbre."<sup>17</sup> Despite similar impoverishment, the Ozarks inspired no such national concern. The region's malnutrition and lack of plumbing were spun as virtues of simple living, a proud choice rather than an exploited condition forced upon it by outsiders. Heralded as self-sufficient, independent pioneers (in a Western sense), while also retaining the "down-home" values of the rural South and the pragmatic sensibility of Midwestern small town folks, Ozarkers became aspirational figures for white Americans who searched for an authentic sense of self in the age of corporatization and suburbanization. A return to rural, folk living promised a return to the rugged individualism that many felt defined the American spirit.<sup>18</sup>

Within this cultural milieu, on May 1, 1960, Silver Dollar City opened to the public. Admission was free, with the idea that SDC was merely a diversion to ensure that people stuck around to pay for the Marvel Cave tour. Tourists could purchase crafts and novelties at the stores, which generated revenue.

SDC aimed to appeal to multigenerational families, offering something for everyone from grandparents to grandchildren to enjoy.<sup>19</sup> To the Herschends' pleasant surprise, the line of cars stretched for a full mile on opening day. It soon became clear that SDC was the main attraction, rather than just a side hustle for Marvel Cave. By 1965, three quarters of a million people per year from all over the United States were coming to SDC, which had lengthened Main Street to include a miner's shack, candy shop, barbershop, gunsmith, print shop, photo gallery, music shop, livery stable, haunted house, sorghum mill, and grist mill with running water.<sup>20</sup> Three years later, SDC added its first roller coaster ride and started charging admission. In 1969, the theme park was featured on one of the nation's most popular television programs, *The Beverly Hillbillies*. The producers decided to make SDC the hometown of the show's fictional family, the Clampetts, who live as hillbilly-fish-out-of-water in Beverly Hills, California. In Season Eight, the Clampetts decamp to the Missouri Ozarks for five episodes to find a suitable husband for daughter Elly May. The desired wedding falls through, but the family spends significant time on Silver Dollar City's Main Street. The season following these episodes saw an explosion in tourism, with visitation up 19%. Silver Dollar City had arrived in national popular consciousness, and there it stayed.<sup>21</sup>

## Performance at Silver Dollar City

From the beginning, SDC emphasized authenticity. The buildings were not simply façades, but fully functional replicas at 7/8 size. While the Herschends did not explain why they scaled down, presumably it saved money on materials and made the town feel quaint and more accessible to children.<sup>22</sup> The Herschends collected paraphernalia to create "atmosphere": horse collars, plows, wagons, dishes, and other late nineteenth-century items to place around the town. Employees wore clothing made from materials available in the 1880s; they spoke in dialect and used period-appropriate vocabulary; the blacksmiths, wood carvers, and basket weavers used tools and methods of the late nineteenth century. Mary Herschend, considered by many to be a proto environmentalist, was adamant that no trees be removed unless absolutely necessary.<sup>23</sup> The result was a vision of humanity in harmony with nature, buildings and objects peeking out from between leafy greenery. They had presciently purchased 640 acres of wilderness surrounding Marvel Cave back in the early 1950s to keep kitschy tourist shops at bay. The first press

release stated, "It is not a ghost town or strictly a museum, but a 'living Ozark Village' . . . a true replica of one which once existed on the same land."<sup>24</sup>

As the quote suggested, what gave SDC its authentic atmosphere was its "living" aspect: the Citizens of SDC. These employees, mostly locals, interacted daily with guests. Atmosphere is vague, ineffable, and indescribable, but suggests that there is something in the air that one breathes to heighten a sense of realism. The Citizens made crafts, sold goods, walked around the park, engaged in friendly banter with guests, and performed street show "bits." One non-local the Herschends hired was a seasoned vaudevillian, circus clown, and Native American impersonator named Lloyd Heller who had settled in Branson in 1959. Heller rang the bell on opening day as the first "Mayor" of Silver Dollar City. He greeted guests on Main Street with "Welcome to Silver Dollar City, where the hands of the clock have turned back and people actually relax and enjoy themselves."<sup>25</sup> He also played a quack doctor in the medicine show and, most enduringly, a blacksmith named Shad. His job as Shad was less the forging of iron and more the creating of memorable, interactive experiences. Sparks flew from his anvil, but more importantly, he offered a constant stream of storytelling. He welcomed guests to "visit a spell" and made them feel like they were part of a slower, Ozarkian sociality. They laughed as he bantered daily with Peter Engler, the woodcarver across the way. He melded into his role so deeply that his tombstone reads Lloyd "Shad" Heller.<sup>26</sup>

Spontaneous, imaginative play dominated those early years. In the Spring of 1962, Ella Mae Tucker got a job working in the photo studio on SDC's Main Street. For eight hours a day, five days a week, she took pictures of park visitors dressed in 1880s costumes and props. Tucker also worked on her family's farm, ran an insurance business, sold real estate, and wrote a weekly newspaper column. Near the end of the summer season, Ruth Heller (Lloyd's wife, who was also a trained actor and employee of SDC) swooped into Ella's photo studio dressed as a brothel madam: bright orange skirt, red fox fur, "lots of rouge and lipstick." The park patrons froze as she "squallied out in a loud dance hall-girl voice, 'Ellie, am I glad to find you . . . Honey, you sure got out of St. Louis just in time! They closed me up!'" Heller's improvised antics continued as she begged Ella Mae for a job, dumped an empty whiskey bottle out of her purse, and claimed that she had "loaded dice" for Ella Mae's husband Byron, who worked in the print shop. The guests stared in shock, uncertain whether Heller was being "real" or not. Byron turned "purple" and "choked with hysterics," but Heller "didn't miss a beat." She pranced out the door and continued to improvise mayhem across the park.

That day, Ella wrote, “everybody play[ed] tricks on everybody else . . . a gay, mad place—no one [knew] what to expect, and enjoy[ed] it.”<sup>27</sup> Performance created a feeling of utopia, a sense of possibility not accessible in everyday life. Just putting on a costume “ma[d]e all the difference,” said JoDee Remien, who worked at SDC in the early 1960s. “You could talk to people in a different way, tease them, and they would respond in a different way.”<sup>28</sup> College student Jae McFerron got a summer job as a street performer in those early years. He recalled that visitors “loved the brash characters that they would run into. I remember thinking, ‘Well, I can just about say anything to these people, and they just think it’s incredible.’”<sup>29</sup>

## Violence and the American Past

How did violence fit into this gay, mad, incredible time warp to the 1880s? Historians characterize the Civil War and its aftermath as particularly brutal in southwest Missouri. Brooks Blevins writes that the Civil War “descend[ed] upon the conflicted Ozarks with a ferocity and relentlessness witnessed in few other places in North America.”<sup>30</sup> As overwhelmingly non-slaveholders, many white Ozarkers were Union sympathizers. But as migrants with Southern roots, many were also members of the Confederacy. In addition to neighbor fighting neighbor as members of opposing Union and Confederate forces, Ozarkers had to face “bushwhackers,” guerrilla fighters who hid in bushes or caves for the purposes of robbing or attacking passers-by, and often claimed no allegiance to either side. The bushwhackers enacted a reign of terror on the region, and families fled in fear. The terror did not abate when the Civil War officially ended. Instead, bushwhacking became a way of life. The Ozarks became a refuge for criminals escaping the authorities, a perfect hideout because of its isolated, mountainous landscape. Absent law enforcement or mainstream social norms, the families who remained or attempted to return were subjected to violent raids on their homes and property with no repercussions.

SDC did not ignore this history of violence. Instead, it turned it into pleasurable, family-friendly entertainment. The most popular “atmosphere” performance was the Hatfield-McCoy Feud, which happened on Main Street at the top of every hour. The Hatfields and McCoyes lived on the border between Kentucky and West Virginia and engaged in a multi-generational feud from 1863 to 1891. Members of the families brutally murdered each other, leaving

bodies "bullet-riddled" and houses burned to the ground. Depicted multiple times in film and television throughout twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the Hatfields and McCoys became the epitome of negative hillbilly stereotypes. Despite the distinctions between Appalachia and the Ozarks, the two regions similarly deployed the hillbilly trope to represent its residents as poor but proud and independent. Grafting the feuding Appalachian families onto SDC's Main Street was thus not a stretch ideologically, and it attracted visitors by virtue of its familiarity.

The SDC street performance turned the violence into comedy and focused on the "star-crossed lovers" aspect of the feud. In the sketch, Zekey Hatfield and Sarey Ellen McCoy's romance sets off a chain reaction of shouts, threats, and blanks fired from rifles. No barricade clearly marks the space of performance. Instead, the audience crowds in, standing merely feet away from the dispute. Hearing the deafening *craaack* of rifles and smelling the acrid smoke must have heightened the sense of realism. But other aspects countered such realism with slapstick comedy. The performers spoke in thick mountain accents to imply backwardness and a lack of education. Physical antics were also key. After her son is shot, Ma Hatfield squats over his body in an unladylike pose. She immodestly hitches up her skirt and sticks her rear end out farther than necessary. She has a corncob pipe in her mouth and stares intently as a country doctor gets down on his hands and knees to place his ear on Zekey's heart. The depiction plays into stereotypes of hillbilly women as masculine and unrefined. The doctor, supposedly one of the richest men in town, has a ripped suit jacket and cartoonishly long moustache. Hillbillies clearly fail at being classy. He also ends up in an undignified pose on the ground.

Another violent entertainment was the train robbery. In 1962, the Herschends purchased a small 3-car train formerly owned by car magnate Henry Ford. It had a working steam engine, open-air coach for 75 passengers, and caboose. The Frisco Silver Dollar Line, as it was called, wound around a track 2/3 of a mile in length through wooded areas of the property. This was the first "ride" at the park, and its success paved the way for the addition of subsequent ones.<sup>31</sup> Multiple times a day, employees portraying infamous bushwhacker Alf Bolin and his gang would hold up tourists riding the Frisco Line. The idea first materialized because the train needed to pause to rebuild steam, and thus the Herschends needed some way to entertain the guests while they waited. Portrayed as "ruffians" (implying a certain level of harmlessness), Bolin and his gang were "clumsy" and never successful in their rob-

bery attempts, though they did shoot off several rounds with their firearms. In real life, Bolin murdered over thirty people and faced a gruesome end—Union soldiers chopped off his head and stuck it on a pike in a town square for all to see.<sup>32</sup> A daily robbery also occurred at the General Store on Main Street. Bad guys wielding guns would come hold up the clerk, she would run to the front porch and yell that she had been robbed, and “the chase was on.” In 1965, the Herschends built an armory for all the weaponry needed, having used 22,000 rounds of blank ammunition in the previous season.<sup>33</sup>

Shootouts were not the only form of violence thematized for atmospheric entertainment in the park. In the early years, the town sheriff also hung a criminal daily in the town square. Done by a law enforcement figure, rather than a mob, the scenario leaned into the Western theme of frontier justice rather than the South’s history of racial terror. Nevertheless, Missouri was the site of brutal lynchings of Black people, the last one which occurred only eighteen years before the park’s opening—well within the lifetime of most visitors.<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps the apotheosis of the violent entertainment was the 1968 addition of the Flooded Mine ride. Visitors climbed into six-person barges that floated on a river through the “Lucky Silver Mine,” modeled after the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Missouri mines that used prisoner labor. At the entrance, SDC employees dressed in prison stripes stood waist-deep in water and shouted that the mine was flooding. Over the course of the ride’s 530 feet, tourists witnessed animatronic convict laborers attempt to escape the floodwaters with their faces contorted in permanent panic. In the 1980s, the Herschends added laser pistols to the ride, which visitors fired at targets to help the warden prevent escapees. As of 2025, the ride still exists at SDC.<sup>35</sup>

The violence in Flooded Mine is meant to be funny. The animatronic figures have exaggerated extra-wide grimaces and grins. Their bodies have elongated, floppy limbs, more like scarecrows or rag dolls than realistic mannequins. One prisoner, waist-deep in water, continuously spits an arc of water out of his mouth like a Roman fountain. Signs contain puns such as “sentenced to hang for 187 days.” In another tableau, a grinning figure sits in a cage as if he is a zoo animal, with a sign that reads “DO NOT FEED THIS PRISONER.” Two animatronic guards play poker at a table to the side of the cage, utterly indifferent to their captive.

The gallows humor distances the visitors from the brutal history of convict labor, but the comedy sits in tension with the realistic scenarios in the ride. Between 1964 and 1967, the Herschends purchased equipment from

lead and zinc mines that had been recently shut down across the state border in Oklahoma to stage the scenarios in the ride. Wheels, pickaxes, jackhammers, shovels, mine cars, pumping stations, and pulleys fill the elaborate panoramas. Boxes labeled "TNT" or "Danger-Explosives" proliferate.<sup>36</sup> The use of historical material objects likened the ride to other sites of dark tourism, where the realism of torture is part of the draw.<sup>37</sup> But Flooded Mine is pitched as family-friendly, whereas the Missouri State Penitentiary tours, for example, are designated for ages twelve and above.<sup>38</sup> Patricia Morris and Tammi Arford, who visited the ride several times in the 2010s, describe one particularly "heinous" scene which was "strikingly similar" to torture depicted in photographs at the Missouri State Penitentiary:

Two convicts in the flooding mine are kept in a cage, where one is hung in a stress position by his wrists from the bars above, while the other is struggling to hold up his fellow prisoner's legs to relieve some of the pressure. . . . This tableau is modeled on a punishment commonly used at the Missouri State Penitentiary in the late 19th century known as "the rings," which involved chaining a man's hands above his head to a metal ring attached to a wall, where he would then be forced to hang for eight to 14 hours a day.<sup>39</sup>

One key detail in the Flooded Mine scenarios is fictionalized: the race of the miners. In the Missouri State Penitentiary photographs, the convicts are predominantly Black; in the ride, they are all depicted as white.<sup>40</sup> As Douglas A. Blackmon has argued, convict labor in the United States was in many ways an attempt to reconstitute "slavery by another name."<sup>41</sup> From one perspective, it is obviously a positive that SDC did not recreate racialized violence as entertainment—the thought of SDC's majority-white tourists gazing upon Black figures being tortured by a gleeful warden is nightmarish. From another perspective, the ride whitewashes history (literally). Doing so reinforces the perception that one can discuss class and labor without race in America.<sup>42</sup>

The Flooded Mine ride was only one of many ways in which Silver Dollar City reframed the violence of the past and thus the present. As chaos raged throughout the US during the fraught 1960s, including riots in Watts and Detroit, protests against the war in Vietnam, and multiple political assassinations, the numbers at SDC kept climbing. Crystal Payton, author of *The Story of Silver Dollar City*, asserts: "The social and political turbulence of the civil rights and anti-war movements not only did not hurt attendance, it just may have helped. . . . Headline America may have been a quarrelsome

place in the 1960s, but those who didn't live in the headline world, and they were many, found respite from the fray in [SDC's] programming and experiences."<sup>43</sup> Reporter Art Gorlick from Chicago wrote about his visit: "Folks for miles around seem to slip back to the late 1800's and revive the friendly atmosphere of what was then an American frontier."<sup>44</sup> The area's representative to US Congress, Durward G. Hall, entered remarks into the Congressional Record to laud Mary Herschend for "us[ing] her womanly intuition and charm, to create a city" that had become "famous for its warm hospitality and country-flavored friendliness." Over and over again, "friendly" and "friendliness" dominated publicity, smoothing out the faux-violent encounters.<sup>45</sup>

Nestled in the bucolic Ozark Mountains, far from the urban centers where riots and protests were happening, an old-fashioned kind of violence comforted visitors. In these spaces, society was not out of control. Instead, performances of ritualized containment happened. Every hour on the hour, Alf Bolin bungled a train robbery and hillbillies shot the pants off each other. Prisoners foolishly tried in vain to escape their fate. The sheriff hung a would-be robber in the town square. Rather than represent a heavy-handed, federal state, the Sheriff was an isolated individual and thus functioned symbolically as more of a father figure protecting his family, in this case the twenty-eight Citizens of Silver Dollar City. All of these acts were cleansed of any stain of racial terror or the political significance that scripted such encounters in their historical moment. Such cleansing functioned to render the contemporary violence of the 1960s as extraordinary and even un-American, rather than as a legacy of America.

In the early 2020s, street troupe member Larry Hoover asserted that the live performances are still "the heart and soul" of SDC. Visitors encounter quirky characters as they walk around the park or visit craft shops. While the hanging and train robbery are gone, Flooded Mine and the Hatfield-McCoy feud continue. Performers also shoot guns multiple times daily at the Saloon show. The policy on guns has gone back and forth. When Hoover started working at SDC in 1997, he and others used Colt 45s and loaded their own blanks. Then after the Columbine school shooting in 1999, SDC mandated that employees use theatrical prop guns. After the Orlando nightclub shooting in 2017, there were no guns at all; then in 2019, they returned to theatrical prop guns with "just primers" to give the effect of using firearms without the loud sound.<sup>46</sup>

SDC never had professional historians on staff and does not advertise itself as an educational institution. In fact, it has claimed to avoid the "often

pretentious historical re-creation of other frontier villages.”<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, in disavowing pretentiousness, it makes a claim to authenticity that gives visitors the emotional feeling of entering the past. In 1969, US Representative Hall stated that SDC was “a reminder that despite the rush and unrest of our world today, the spirit and spice left to us by our ancestry still permeate the air and the 1880 way of life lives on.”<sup>48</sup> Brochures long marketed the park as “Our Nation’s Reunion with Its Past.”<sup>49</sup> Heller, who trained generations of performers at SDC, aimed always “to preserve ‘the glorious and colorful past.’”<sup>50</sup>

The 1960s were a moment in which college students, activists, and a new generation of historians began to challenge the whitewashed history of the United States. Today, those challenges have mounted not only in the halls of higher education, but also in K–12 schools and the popular media, with journalistic pieces like *The 1619 Project* arguing that slavery is the founding dynamic of the US polity, not the American Revolution.<sup>51</sup> These revisions demarcate white pioneers as violent colonizers who often relied on enslaved labor to build their new domains. Conservative activists have even accused Disney—the whipping boy of a previous generation of left-leaning academics—of falling prey to revisionist depictions of American history and culture.<sup>52</sup> In light of this shift, SDC has become a refuge, where the story of the white pioneer lives on as wholesome and just. The encounters with SDC Citizens are pleasurable, friendly, and funny, promising park visitors that this narrative is still a usable past for building a bright future.

## Notes

1. *Leader and Press Staff*, “Off Beat,” *Springfield (Missouri) Leader and Press*, October 31, 1963.

2. *Leader and Press Staff*, “Off Beat.”

3. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 7.

4. Jane Desmond, *Staging Tourism: Bodies on Display from Waikiki to Sea World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), xiv.

5. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 175–176; Stephen Fjellman, *Vinyl Leaves: Walt Disney World and America* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

6. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 3.

7. Bethanee Bemis, *Disney Theme Parks and America’s National Narratives: Mirror, Mirror, for Us All* (New York: Routledge, 2023), 3.

8. *USA Today*, “These 10 theme parks are the best in the country, according to USA TODAY 10Best readers,” May 20, 2023, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/10best/awards/2023/05/20/best-theme-park-2023/70219956007/>

9. Bob McGill, *Branson's Entertainment Pioneers: A Success Story for Our Times* (Reed Spring, MO: White Oak Publishing, 2011), 24.

10. Richard F. Weingroff, "Three States Claim First Interstate Highway," *Public Roads* 60, no. 1 (1996). U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration. Accessed January 27, 2022, <https://highways.dot.gov/public-roads/summer-1996/three-states-claim-first-interstate-highway>

11. For more, see Joanna Dee Das, *Faith, Family, and Flag: Branson Entertainment and the Idea of America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2025).

12. Richard White, "Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill," in *The Frontier in American Culture: An Exhibition at the Newberry Library*, ed. James R. Grossman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). See also Allan G. Bogue, "Frederick Jackson Turner Reconsidered," *The History Teacher* 27, no. 2 (1994): 195-221; William Cronon, "Revisiting the Vanishing Frontier: The Legacy of Frederick Jackson Turner," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1987): 157-176.

13. Brooks Blevins, "Wretched and Innocent: Two Mountain Regions in the National Consciousness," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 7, no. 2 (2001): 259.

14. Vance Randolph, *The Ozarks: An American Survival of Primitive Society* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2017 [1931]), 15, 20; Otto Ernest Rayburn, *Ozark Country* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2021 [1941]), 27.

15. United States Census Bureau. "2020 Center of Population Press Kit." 2022. <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-kits/2021/2020-center-of-population.html#:~:text=In%20other%20words%2C%20the%20center,was%20located%20in%20Chestertown%2C%20Maryland>

16. This lumping is particularly true in regard to the hillbilly archetype. Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Blevins, "Wretched and Innocent."

17. Blevins, "Wretched and Innocent," 266.

18. Belvins, "Wretched and Innocent," 261. For more on the allure of the "down-home" South in the 1960s, see Zachary Lechner, *The South of the Mind: American Imaginings of White Southernness, 1960-1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018).

19. For more on SDC and Branson's family-friendly ethos overall, see Das, *Faith, Family, and Flag*.

20. Forrest Bradley, "250,000 Visitors Expected This Year," *Springfield Leader and Press*, June 25, 1961; Dickson Terry, "There's Gold in Those Ozark Hills," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 29, 1965, 1.

21. *The Beverly Hillbillies* Full Episodes, Season 8, Episode 3, 16:30-17:52, uploaded October 20, 2016, accessed July 1, 2022, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IE5o7SIAZr0&list=PLAe\\_Lo-6y-7pnR8jF9py31B7\\_NQ\\_8AS6j&index=30](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IE5o7SIAZr0&list=PLAe_Lo-6y-7pnR8jF9py31B7_NQ_8AS6j&index=30); Paul Stubblefield, "Ozarks Sprucing Up for Tourism Season," *Kansas City Star*, April 23, 1971.

22. Disney scaled down the buildings on Disneyland's Main Street, constructed in 1955. While there is not a good scholarly resource to explain why, some sources allude to Walt Disney wanting the buildings to be "pony-sized," presumably meaning quaint and more accessible. See Richard Francaviglia, "History after Disney: The Significance of 'Imagined' Historical Places," *The Public Historian* 17, no. 4 (1995): 69-74.

23. Crystal Payton, *The Story of Silver Dollar City: A Pictorial History of Branson's Famous Ozark Mountain Theme Park* (Branson, MO: Lens & Pen Production, 1997), Second edition, 2007, 59; McGill, *Branson's Entertainment Pioneers*, 24–25; Margaret Newton, *'Shad': A Biography of Lloyd 'Shad' Heller* (Springfield, MO: Pin Oak Publishing Company, 1982), 200.

24. "Silver Dollar City Opening May 1," *White River Leader*, April 22, 1960. Courtesy of Lisa Rau.

25. Newton, *Shad*, 194.

26. Newton, *Shad*, 194.

27. Ella Mae Tucker, "Out Our Way," *Springfield Leader and Press*, September 9, 1962.

28. Quoted in Payton, *The Story of Silver Dollar City*, 65. JoDee Remien would go on to marry Pete Herschend.

29. Jae McFerron, interview by Joanna Dee Das, March 1, 2022, Branson, Missouri.

30. Brooks Blevins, *A History of the Ozarks, Volume 1* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 238.

31. "Talking Things Over," *Springfield Leader and Press*, April 29, 1962; Larry Klinger, "Area Has a New Railroad Line," *Springfield Daily News*, May 28, 1962.

32. Vickie Hooper, "Who the Heck Was Alf Bolin? Forsyth Remembers an Outlaw," *Bittersweet* 10, no. 3 (1983, orig. pub. 1981); uploaded by Springfield-Greene County Library, accessed April 8, 2024, <https://thelibrary.org/lohist/periodicals/bittersweet/sp83b.htm>

33. McGill, *Branson's Entertainment Pioneers*, 26; Payton, *The Story of Silver Dollar City*, 57–68; June Ward, interviewed by Joanna Dee Das, Silver Dollar City, Branson, Missouri, May 11, 2022.

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35. I myself rode Flooded Mine on May 11, 2022.

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## CHAPTER 5

# The World on Display from the Comfort of Home

## *Covid Olympics and Staging National Identity*

Susan Tenneriello

The Olympic Movement and its mission “to contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport practice” has endured numerous geopolitical crises that jeopardized the legitimacy and legacy of the Olympic Games since the festival’s modern revival in 1896.<sup>1</sup> The delayed 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics and the 2022 Beijing Winter Games held during the global COVID-19 pandemic are two recent examples of the scale of sociopolitical crisis and recovery engrained within Olympic cultural history. Throughout the history of the Olympics, war, political conflicts, social unrest, as well as incidents of terrorism have inflected the Olympic ideals of international community and spirited amateur competition with somber realities. Following the suspension of the Games during World War II, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) entered a rebranding phase to revive the Olympic Movement by expanding into global markets through revenue streams of brand marketing, selling television rights, and appealing to destination tourism. One way of accomplishing this rebuilding strategy occurred through the enlargement of the Game’s opening ceremony, allowing host nations to platform national culture and heritage on a global stage in order to maximize viewership and boost Olympic ideals through the showcase of the opening and closing ceremonies. At the same time, government-led boycotts during the Cold War—anti-apartheid boycotts in Montreal (1976), American-led boycotts in Moscow (1980), and Eastern Bloc boycotts in Los Angeles (1984)—marked what Christopher Young calls the IOC’s “most troubled period,”<sup>2</sup> threatening the momentum of Olympic sport culture’s global status as a “mega-event.”<sup>3</sup>

The opening ceremony of the Games is a carefully curated program that is regulated by the IOC.<sup>4</sup> Many of the rites mooring Olympic ideals and inspiring the creative visions of national identity present in the opening ceremony contributed to the monumental status the Games now hold as *the* global sport mega-event. Yet, the legacy of the Olympics is increasingly put at risk by domestic tensions and geopolitical actions taken by the administration of the IOC that contribute to ever-widening controversies surrounding the bidding process, commercial licensing, doping scandals, and corruption (exposed by critic Helen Jefferson Lenskyj and others in the “Olympic industry”).<sup>5</sup> There persists a fraught ideology in The Olympic Movement as the global cooperation celebrated in the Games continues to be disrupted by political protests, social activism, terrorism, policing, financial excess, and charges of ecological damage. Embedded in the opening ceremony of the Games is how the IOC navigates this environment of geopolitical power relations.

This essay investigates the opening ceremonies at Tokyo (2020) and Beijing (2022) to examine the troubled circulation of controversies straining the Olympics and the ways in which each host nation designed a representational narrative that attempted to avert, memorialize, or conceal controversy during the global COVID-19 pandemic. I consider actual and performed narratives of these pandemic Games, including how they approached memorializing loss, celebrating survival and resilience, charges of sexual harassment, doping scandals, and human rights protests. These two high-profile Olympic ceremonies demonstrate the ways transnational destination events, as sites of live and virtual tourism, performance, and spectatorship, negotiate adversity in real-time. Their complex mediation of domestic politics and global crises during the pandemic provides my focus into patterns of staging collective grief and healing in the Olympic Opening Ceremony. Olympic spectacles are transient, feel-good events that construct an imaginary sphere of global community, forging a cultural site of “collective memory,” as theorized by Maurice Halbwachs, for multinational athletes and visitors alike.<sup>6</sup> The opening ceremony has become a cornerstone for augmenting modes of live visitation to celebrate and commemorate the culture of sport every four years; through the creation of the Olympic Broadcasting Services (OBS), a permanent hosting system dedicated to diversifying broadcast, radio, and digital platforms, the IOC invites short-form, streaming, and social media models of visitation for spectators, athletes, and broadcast partners.<sup>7</sup> Yet, the ephemeral aspirations enacted in the opening ceremony remain bound to real-world complications that challenge the varied stages of visitation, whether the performance is

experienced in real time, on recorded media, or over social media platforms. I argue that the conceptual spaces at the Tokyo and Beijing opening ceremonies were staged to recover collective expressions of memory, trauma, and future hope, exposing a performance ethos of Olympic destinations to brand their own sustainability and survival—even when this aspirational model collapses into monumental sites of controversy.

The cultural practices that are incorporated into each Olympic opening ceremony offer a point of access into sports mega-events (SMEs), and how host countries and governing organizations such as the IOC mitigate or manipulate domestic or international environments during times of crisis. Available data from 2020 currently estimates 3 million deaths worldwide related to COVID-19, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).<sup>8</sup> The decision by the IOC to move forward with holding the Olympics in the summer of 2021 was a radical one while the population of many countries, including Japan and China, remained under COVID restrictions. Although the decision caused widespread public controversy, the Tokyo opening program marked a moment of visitation to reflect and acknowledge the imprint of loss, suffering, uncertainty, and social isolation on athletes and spectators, whereas the opening ceremony at Beijing memorialized resilience and strength. In different ways their opening ceremonies used the Olympic stage to rekindle hope and the Olympic spirit within an inclusive recovery narrative. Yet, the national design of each ceremony also offers a glimpse into contested narratives of geopolitical power relations in Olympic-inspired global integration. The field of sport performance historically, notes Shannon Walsh, is seldom free of political entanglements.<sup>9</sup> The layers of controversy surrounding these Games present the opportunity to examine how sport performance contemporaneously revises or camouflages contested spaces of sociopolitical representation.

Global sports mega-events additionally raise the complexities of cultural practices that engage public diplomacy through marketing, representational narratives, or destination venues, sometimes scrutinized as “sportswashing” or reputation laundering.<sup>10</sup> Notably, international sports events governed by organizations like the IOC provide sponsoring nations or regimes a branded world platform to sanitize critiques of human rights abuses and/or corruption. The diversionary tactics implied in sportswashing are especially notable in the crafted pageantry of the Olympic Opening Ceremony. Although Olympic spectacles attempt to minimize controversy leading into the sport competitions, the bedazzlement of the opening ceremony is not immune

from becoming a contested site of geopolitics. The ceremonies at Tokyo and Beijing went forward absent crowds of international tourists, spectators, and enormous casts of volunteer performers. While their hybrid live/mixed media performances coalesced around uplifting emotion and togetherness, continuous calls to cancel the Games for various political, economic, and medical reasons threatened the very existence of The Olympic Movement.

Well before the COVID-19 pandemic spread worldwide, the longevity of the IOC and the aspirational ideals of the Olympics were facing economic, political, and tourism challenges.<sup>11</sup> In the run-up to the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games, the high economic costs and political consequences of hosting the Olympics were on full display. Anti-government protests, street robberies, ecological pollution, and ongoing police violence in the city's *favelas* threatened to upend the festivities. It renewed scrutiny of the Olympic Movement as an international festival model that could no longer sustain its own economic promise and progressive mystique. In contrast to the high-tech splendor of previous ceremonies—such as Sydney's 2000 epic dreamscape or Beijing's 2008 "One World, One Dream" spectacular—Rio's opening program went against the grain. Due to budget restrictions the ceremony was deliberately low tech and modest by current Olympic standards. The ceremony was designed to foreground Brazil's rainforests and ecological preservation, while also proving to skeptical Brazilians and worldwide critics that the Olympic spirit was alive and well.

IOC President Thomas Bach called the Rio Olympics "marvelous Games in a marvelous city."<sup>12</sup> But, in contrast, sports economist Andrew Zimbalist argued that the extravagant investment now required to host the Games had turned the Olympics into a "circus maximus" of escalating expenditures for transportation, security, communications, and construction among other costs.<sup>13</sup> The daunting expense of the infrastructure necessary to host the Games has impacted the bidding process in the twenty-first century, and further restricted the number of countries willing to undertake the economic risk of hosting. For instance, following Rio's successful bid to host the 2016 Games only three cities applied in 2010 to host the 2018 Winter Olympics: Pyeongchang, South Korea; Munich, Germany; and Annecy, France.<sup>14</sup> Pyeongchang was awarded the Winter Games, followed by Tokyo as host of the 2020 Summer Olympics, and Beijing for the 2022 Winter Games, marking the second time each country hosted the Olympics. With the return of the Winter Olympics and Summer Olympics to East Asia, Bach's remarks after the Rio Games demonstrated the IOC's resolve to rebuild the image of the

Olympic Movement once again at a time of declining popularity, weakening corporate sponsorship, and credibility issues stemming from major doping scandals.<sup>15</sup> Questions swirled: What does the future hold for the legacy of the Olympics? Could this century-old institution, clinging to the ideals of the Olympic Movement, again reinvent itself?

## The Covid Olympics: Tokyo

The return of the Summer Olympics to Tokyo had the potential to further reboot The Olympic Movement. In 2011, Tokyo's initial bid for the 2020 Games followed the devastating earthquake and tsunami in northeastern Japan the same year.<sup>16</sup> Under the slogan "Discover Tomorrow" the Bid Committee outlined a vision of the Games to inspire youth and highlight regional revival, overcoming adversity, and displaying Japan's cutting-edge contemporary culture.<sup>17</sup> With a refocus on pandemic recovery, the 2020 opening ceremony reconceived the framework of renewal with an imaginative and innovative vision of youth culture and technological advancement. The ceremony allowed for healing and memorialization that projected a shared bond outward to pandemic-ravaged spectators. Additionally, the ceremony held resonance for domestic audiences as it commemorated the 1964 Tokyo Games—the first Olympics held in East Asia—with a high-tech, animated display of Japan's artistic traditions, leaning into the country's vibrant future and technological identity.

The legacy of the Tokyo Games might be its designation as "The Covid Olympics" for continuing on in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. A groundswell of concerns for the medical safety of the athletes, team delegations, media and organizing staffs, volunteers, and huge crowds descending into Tokyo as coronavirus infection rates swelled, pushed the IOC (in consultation with the Tokyo 2020 Organizing Committee [TOC]) to postpone the Olympics for the first time in its history.<sup>18</sup> Economically, Japan's investment at the time amounted to over ten million dollars with millions of tickets sold domestically and worldwide, placing pressure on the IOC to salvage these Games.<sup>19</sup> IOC President Bach stressed "The Olympic Movement is facing an unprecedented challenge," following the postponement, adding "this new situation will need all our solidarity, creativity, determination and flexibility."<sup>20</sup> Assurances of a safe and secure Olympics were reiterated by Bach and TOC President Mori Yoshiro.<sup>21</sup> The announcement of the Games' return in

July 2021 did not alleviate the fears, uncertainty, or resistance from national team organizers, athletes, sports federations, and the scientific community as planning underwent revision.<sup>22</sup> Through the spring of 2021 coronavirus infections surged in Japan, leading to a fourth COVID-19 state-of-emergency, renewing protests within the country to cancel the Games.<sup>23</sup> The Japanese government decided to prohibit overseas spectators and the families of athletes from attending the Games in person.<sup>24</sup> Host broadcaster OBS stepped up its ability to supply global connectivity by generating a wide range of live and video coverage of the Games for multiplatform distribution by television, radio, streaming, and mobile broadcast partners, customized for local viewers through a suite of cloud services. In adjusting to the absence of live spectators and broadcast partners working remotely OBS produced 30% more content than at the 2016 Rio Olympics to surmount the challenges of the pandemic by increasing digital transmission.<sup>25</sup>

Leading into 2020 both the IOC agenda and Japan were preparing to implement new Olympic initiatives to promote gender equality, solidarity, and unity in diversity in the opening ceremony. The inclusive stance of the new equity agenda ran into multiple scandals when underlying sexist and ablest attitudes surfaced in remarks by Tokyo organizers and the creative team that spread across social media and international media outlets. In early 2021 Mori resigned as president of the organizing committee after comments overheard by reporters at a committee meeting surfaced about the annoyance women caused by talking too long at board meetings.<sup>26</sup> In March, the ceremony's creative director, Hiroshi Sasaki, stepped down after insultingly joking about popular comedian Naomi Watanabe's weight. Days before the opening ceremony composer Keigo Oyamada (known as Cornelius) resigned and his four-minute composition was removed from the program after comments he made about bullying disabled childhood classmates resurfaced from interviews in magazines from the 1990s.<sup>27</sup> On the heels of Keigo's resignation, comedian and theater director Kentaro Kobayashi (hired to replace Hiroshi) was fired when attention came to a comedy routine he had performed in the 1990s, which showed him making fun of the Holocaust. Prior to the opening ceremony President Bach sidestepped the critical clamor to praise Japanese organizers' ability to overcome adversities to bring the world together in a "celebration of unity and solidarity."<sup>28</sup> In concert, New TOC President Hashimoto Seiko, a former Olympian, reassuringly spoke of plans for Tokyo to be "unlike any previous Olympic Games." She continued,

“It is because the world is divided by the coronavirus that we now need to send a message of cooperation and coexistence through sport.”<sup>29</sup> While these scandals did not derail the Games from taking place, they further strained the credibility of the IOC and Japan’s National Organizing Committee’s new inclusion and equity agenda.

As the first global live event to occur during the Covid-19 pandemic, the ceremony acknowledged the ongoing isolation and adversity of living through an unprecedented time of upheaval and loss. In the lead-in to the traditional countdown to the opening ceremony, a live panning shot of Tokyo’s luminous, empty streets held an eerie familiarity of life under quarantine. The scenic framing evoked a pandemic repertoire of embodied memory, to borrow from Diana Taylor’s notion of acts reconstituting social trauma.<sup>30</sup> Over a year into a pandemic life of separation, lockdowns, suffering, and uncertainty the four-hour ceremony mediated for distant spectators watching on television and via digital platforms a performance of collective memory through narrative reenactments of isolation and sacrifice honoring athletes and essential workers alike.<sup>31</sup> Its virtually augmented design featured flooring composed of an LED panel grid for projection-mapping in order to blend live action with video and animation technology to create a virtual spectacle. However, the nearly empty 68,000-seat stadium highlighted the sparse design of the opening program, which emphasized empathy and compassion under the theme “United by Emotion.”

The ceremony built off the concept of emotion, with a solemn program juxtaposing sentiments of adversity and revival. The first live segment commemorated being “apart but not alone.” This sequence began in the Olympic Stadium with an isolated female athlete, Tsubata Arisa, wearing white and running alone on a treadmill. Her rhythmic breathing syncopated to the beat of the musical score with each exhale of exertion. As the camera angle widened, white garmented dancers emerged around her performing a stationary choreography of athletic workouts. Running, cycling, and rowing in place, the athletes’ isolated training without teams or coaches reinforced the difficulties of the moment. The focus on Tsubata, who is both a middleweight boxer and a nurse, simultaneously represented athletes and essential workers, two groups who were both later honored during the Olympic Flag ceremony as flag bearers. The entrance of the flag was accompanied by rolling footage across the stadium floor of professional and volunteer essential workers from around the world. The ceremony’s repertoire of remembrance, of living

memory, underscored the fresh remains of pandemic memory, or as Rebecca Schneider argues, how performance acts as a “means of re-appearance” or a “kind of archive and host to collective memory.”<sup>32</sup>

The ceremony’s trajectory enfolded the recovery of pandemic experiences with visions and sentiments reaching beyond the present crisis to celebrate diversity, solidarity, and the chance for a brighter tomorrow. Expressions of national identity interwove a neo-Tokyo aesthetic of youthful animation with the iconography of traditional Japanese heritage through all sections of the ceremony. The main stage, represented by the sun and Mount Fuji, had a connecting *hanamichi* runway inspired by the *kabuki* stage with a fan-shaped podium. During the parade of athletes, the placards carried in from each of the two hundred national teams participating displayed the country within graphic black and white *manga* speech bubbles. The music underscoring team entries consisted of a medley of popular video game music from *Dragon Quest*, *Monster Hunter*, *Sonic the Hedgehog* and *Final Fantasy* to name a few. One of the more stunning transformations came at the end of the parade. Children ran forward carrying colored blocks of different sizes, out of which they created the 2020 emblem. The ever-shifting camera work soared up into the sky above the stadium, where a fleet of drones replicated the children’s “game” before coalescing into an image of the earth, signifying a world of difference being together. This super-tech visual emblem also gave pause for contemplation and memorialization, accenting the scale of the spectacle and linking inward reflective emotion to an outward projection of unity.

Perhaps the ceremony’s most emotion-filled moment was a moment of silence to remember those we have lost. A darkened, empty stadium increased the sense of absence during this pause of personal remembrance. It opened a live space for those present and those viewing remotely to feel the voids of grief. The many layers of emotional connection were part of the narrative design—the second section, in fact, was titled “Connecting the Dots.” They reached into memories both local and collective, past and present, individually and among community. One such emotional correspondence occurred in the legacy segment of the ceremony, during which the Olympic Rings are formed in a unique way. The section commemorated renewal following the trauma and memory of World War II and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 that was a central narrative in the 1964 Tokyo Games opening ceremony.<sup>33</sup> The lighting of the Olympic cauldron in 1964, for instance, symbolized the country rising from the ruins of the war. Runner Yoshinori Sakai, who was born in Hiroshima the day

the atomic bomb was dropped on the city, was chosen as the final torch bearer to light the Olympic flame. The legacy of 1964 was memorialized in the 2021 ceremony when traditional Japanese woodworking carpenters took the stage. The craftspeople used lumber taken from trees that were planted from seeds at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics to shape giant wooden rings. In another throwback to 1964, when pictograms of different Olympic sports were introduced into the ceremony, a living picture book came to life on screen as actors reenacted fifty of the unique images. For Japan's domestic audiences, the memorial to past national trauma and the country's recovery from it contained nuanced symbolism following the more recent loss of life and displacement of residents after the 2011 earthquake and the ensuing disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear complex.<sup>34</sup>

The opening ceremony had the highest viewership in Japan since 1964, with half the Tokyo and surrounding regions (73.27 million people) tuning into the spectacle.<sup>35</sup> While traditional media in the US and Europe such as NBC's television broadcast drew its smallest audience in decades (17 million), investments by OBS toward diversifying digital platforms through Olympic media channels and Olympic digital partnerships to draw viewership and increase engagement succeeded in amassing billions of virtual and social media viewers over the course of the Games.<sup>36</sup> In media terms, Tokyo's opening ceremony was a remote success. Visitors accustomed to connecting through zoom screens during the pandemic had a front row seat to a virtual spectacle that embraced an ongoing crisis with youthful energy and theatrical vitality to re-invoke Japan's history and heritage as a beacon to a brighter tomorrow.

## Together: Beijing

Beijing's 2022 Olympic opening ceremony might also be viewed as a recovery narrative, but it was one that looked reflexively inward. Even its theme, "One World, One Family," suggested a variation of Beijing 2008's dreamier worldview that integrated China's superpower status on the world stage through the expression of cultural heritage and national identity. Like Japan, China has now hosted both a Summer and Winter Games. These were held under the direction of different presidents with different geopolitical objectives. During President Hu Jintao's governance, the 2008 Olympic Opening Ceremony strengthened modern China's increasing visibility in world affairs. The

sumptuous mass choreography and vibrant cultural traditions showcasing Chinese history consolidated the nation's inviting collective image as a super-power in harmony with world cultures and geopolitics. Under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, elected in 2013, the national complexion has changed. Xi's solidification of central authority has strengthened China's ascension and confidence to compete politically, economically, and technologically with democratic governing structures. Tracing China's political trajectory from Hu's aspirational strategy to Xi's competitive model Michelle Cabula and Stefano Pochettino argue that Beijing 2022 was used to communicate China's "authoritarian governance system and prove its legitimacy and success to the domestic and international audience, amidst the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, diplomatic boycotts, and allegations of human rights violations."<sup>37</sup> Notably, Cai Qi, President of the Beijing Organizing Committee, touted the "robust leadership and personal guidance" of President Xi in the committee's efforts to provide "a green, inclusive, open and clean approach to preparing and hosting the Games."<sup>38</sup> The latter part of Cai's statement references Beijing's compliance with the IOC's 2020 Olympics agenda mentioned above. Sustainability, equity, and protecting athletes with stronger anti-doping measures were included among its target goals.<sup>39</sup>

Conceptually the opening ceremony was designed to symbolize global community, but it also emphasized iconography of China's pan-ethnic identity to symbolize the country's strength and solidarity under President Xi. The official Beijing 2022 motto "Together for a Shared Future" could also be seen to embrace the IOC's reputational recovery of The Olympic Movement. Artistic director and famed filmmaker Zhang Yimou, who staged the epic 2008 opening ceremony for the Beijing Games, returned to envision what he described as a "simple, safe, splendid" program.<sup>40</sup> The cast of over 3,000 was composed of citizens—many of them teenagers—from Beijing and Hebei province where the initial outbreak of COVID-19 in 2019 spread from Wuhan to mainland China. Since international spectators were not allowed in the city, a select crowd of over one hundred thousand local spectators attended the live performance. Globally, two billion virtual visitors were treated to another hybrid staging, technically choreographed to envision the warm-hearted, diverse people of a resilient People's Republic of China welcoming the world as one family.<sup>41</sup>

Winter ceremonies are characteristically shorter than their Summer counterparts. Beijing's ceremony kept to a relatively modest scale in both design and duration. The ceremony clocked in at just over two hours, with

the longest section featuring the parade of athletes entering the stadium. It was filled with high-tech special effects, including live-motion capture, virtuality, and augmented technology, creating a seamless interface of live action and enhanced visual spectacle for television and digital media viewers. Extensive use of interactive projection-mapping made the stage floor resemble an ice surface within the National Stadium known as the Bird's Nest. In contrast to Tokyo's recognition of sacrifice and isolation during the pandemic, Beijing opened the ceremony by pointing away from the hardships of the pandemic to celebrate happiness and renewed hope with the beginning of spring, which coincided with the Chinese New Year. In the stadium signs of spring emerged. Swaying green dandelion stems formed by live performers sprouted upward out of the cool ground, virtual butterflies fluttered by, and a silhouette of a child's face etched onto the icy blue flooring, representing the future, blew on the swirling dandelion shoots. The figuratively spreading spring seeds then ascended into the sky, reappearing in a firework display as dandelions. The warmth of spring comingled with snow and ice signifying purity and beauty, which channeled an astonishing visual spectacle blending live and virtual effects. The aesthetic splendor of the frosty winter landscape concealed alternative messages. Communication scholars Yilei Wang, Dezhi Feng, and Hua Wong, in their study of the iconography of winter sports showcased in the ceremony, view a strategy of popularizing China's recent investment in winter sports industries to market tourism and to develop youth programs as crafting an image of contemporary China that is socially and economically progressive.<sup>42</sup> In one section of the performance featuring "Champions of Tomorrow," a video scroll of adorable young children learning to skate, snowboard, and play hockey highlighted a campaign to the Chinese people to "participate in winter sports."<sup>43</sup> Marketed as a winter site of visitation, the sports segments positioned Beijing as both a cultural and winter sport capital. Another action-filled segment presented performers dressed as hockey players shooting virtual hockey pucks that shattered an ice block rising from the stadium floor. The Olympic Rings were formed as the virtual ice fractured into crystals that magically shaped the rings.

Snowflake imagery formed a central theme throughout the opening ceremony unfurling a creative metamorphosis that symbolized humanity in all its diversity and difference. Inspired by the fusion of sentiments from Tang Dynasty poet Li Bai, "snowflakes in the Yan Mountains are as big as a mattress," and the Western saying "no two snowflakes are alike," snowflakes appeared everywhere during the ceremony: in videos, costuming, as

background, and even in song.<sup>44</sup> One giant snowflake became a core scenic emblem of the multi-pronged narrative, suggesting people of different cultures coming together to form one national family, and welcoming the global community. The placards carried in front of each of the ninety-one participating national delegations during the parade of athletes were shaped like a snowflake. At the end of the parade the placard bearers, wearing tiger-head hats for the year 2022 and costumed in patterns of snow and ice inspired by Chinese painting, lined the stage to dance while holding the placards of each country. Their dance was animated by virtual snowflake placards fluttering around them as the dancers held their snowflake above their heads. The illusion of delicate snowfall then transformed into an enormous snowflake with the national placards flying toward each other to form the center encircled by six calligraphic olive branches. This purposeful set piece remained on stage for the remainder of the program. Its elaborate staging balanced the unification of national status belonging among a diverse network of nations coming together in global unity. The metamorphoses of the snowflake imagery subtly expressed China's economic strength and embrace of geopolitical competition as an East Asian superpower. Koji Kobayashi and other scholars of international sport politics have noted that the recent East Asian Era of the Olympic Games (Seoul in 2018, Tokyo in 2020, and Beijing in 2022) suggests a historic shift away from the West's dominance in global discourse, as countries such as China display surging economic growth and political power on the world stage.<sup>45</sup>

"The story of a snowflake" as described by organizers, was further embossed with the emotional significance of the Chinese people's social harmony.<sup>46</sup> Such sentiments of inclusion and cooperation are grounded in Olympic values. Beijing threaded these ideals in a ceremonial charm offensive, invoking happy memories of visitation and hospitality toward virtual guests and future tourists. The many references to family as a unifying construct of national identity is rooted in Confucian tradition; performance scholar Kim Suk-Young notes, "Confucian ideals value the family as one organic body and the basis of a universal structure postulate an intrinsic relationship between individual and family, and extend that notion of the state and even the universe."<sup>47</sup> The pageantry of the snowflake, as a symbol of China's pan-ethnic family, continued prior to the lighting of the Olympic flame marking the start of the Games. Beijing's ceremony staged a theatrical display of the release of doves to reflect national belonging, reiterating the notion of one family, one world. In the darkened stadium six hundred children in snowflake costumes

scattered all across the stage holding white luminous puppet doves. As their feet stepped on the LED flooring, live-motion capture stars and snowflakes mingled around them. Slowly the individual performers came together to form a glowing white heart with the giant snowflake at its center. The cauldron used to light the Olympic flame at the end of the ceremony was tucked within the purity of the glistening giant snowflake on stage. The Olympic flame was ceremoniously lit within the center of the snowflake, expressing the warm heart of China welcoming the world.

Snow, ice, and warmth echoing throughout the ceremony imparted representational characteristics that projected patriotic unity in diversity. In keeping with paying tribute to the many volunteers and essential workers, who selflessly performed critical jobs throughout the pandemic, the citizens of China were celebrated in rolling imagery across the projection flooring in a similar memorial sequence to Tokyo's ceremony. During the ceremony's flag-raising section, representatives from fifty-six ethnic groups across China passed the national flag hand to hand, while a young solo trumpeter played the popular song "Me and My Motherland." Rallying domestic pride is not unusual in Olympic ceremonies. One of the challenges in staging the ceremony is splintering appeal to arouse the spirits of domestic and worldwide spectators. Tensions around ethnic representation in China have been heightened internationally over China's policies toward its Muslim Uyghur population. Charges of torture and genocide rose to a crescendo as Beijing prepared to host the Games. Political pressure mounted to boycott Beijing Olympics as documentation of the human rights abuses made international headlines. In 2021, a United Nations report outlined China's treatment of Uyghurs and other predominately Muslim ethnic communities in the Xinjiang region, suggesting possible crimes against humanity. The report "contains victim accounts that substantiate mass arbitrary detention, torture, cultural persecution, forced labor, and other serious human rights violations."<sup>48</sup>

A diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Olympics by the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Canada occurred in December 2022. It escalated pressure on the Chinese government, which denied accusations of an ongoing genocide. Within this political and social context Chinese officials' choice of Dinigeer Yilamujiang as one of the athletes to light the Olympic torch during the ceremony (skier Zhao Jiawen joined her) appeared to deliberately exploit the political and public outcry. Dinigeer is a Uyghur cross-country skier from the western Chinese Province of Xinjiang. The simultaneous representations of Chinese solidarity and international scrutiny of

Chinese human rights abuses entangled Beijing's opening ceremony in the politics of trauma as part of the performance culture of sport that left behind intrigue and global controversy. But if the broader goal of China's strategy was to recover national momentum following the devastating global impact of the COVID-19 outbreak, Beijing's ceremony leapt over the politics of trauma to celebrate the Chinese people's national unity and strength as one family.

## The Olympic Agenda

The different versions of the recovery narrative demonstrated in Tokyo and Beijing did not relieve the pandemic's catastrophic impact, but it did offer a communal space toward collective remembrance and healing. Each ceremony memorialized aspects of past Olympics and past political climates by celebrating a revival of life and sport through the re-appearance of the Games. Tokyo's performance more directly reenacted the sacrifices and struggles of pandemic life, with its repertory of remote workouts, memorial rites, and heroic essential personnel as a way to reconnect and move forward into a brighter future emblematic of Japan's energetic heritage and culture. Beijing's subdued ceremony featured the resilience of the Chinese people to lead the way forward as a symbol of global power. These successive ceremonies also expressed the cultural, technological, and economic ingenuity and fortitude of East Asia's sociopolitical dominance on the world stage.

The aspirational recovery narratives of Tokyo and Beijing opening ceremonies renew attention on how Olympic-inspired sport performance marks, obscures, or sanitizes controversy. Prior to the pandemic, Pyeongchang's Games highlighted "New Horizons," providing much-needed momentum to the tarnished image of the Olympic Movement as the IOC attempted to revive its imperiled legacy with a long-term strategy of sustainability and partnerships.<sup>49</sup> However, President Bach's rebuilding plan flagged following the IOC's insistence on moving forward with the Tokyo and Beijing Olympics during a deadly global pandemic. Throughout its 130-year history the IOC has maintained an adaptive strategy to promoting the Olympic Movement and staging the Games that is codified in The Olympic Charter, which remains a living document of Olympic governance. The IOC's 2020 strategic roadmap targeting areas of credibility, sustainability, and youth aimed to rebuild the Olympic Movement to "safeguard the Olympic values and strengthen the role of sport in society" under the slogan "change or be changed."<sup>50</sup> This ambitious reform

process outlined goals toward gender equality, solidarity, trust, clean athletics, sustainable development goals, and media distribution to digital platforms that crafted the forward-looking themes appearing in Pyeongchang, Tokyo, and Beijing.

But questions remain on whether these goals have been achieved. What the IOC did not envision was a global pandemic and renewed criticism of the Games' human rights record clouding its future.<sup>51</sup> As the Tokyo and Beijing Olympics unfolded on a world stage amid a global pandemic, the narrative expressions of coming together in unity spilled over into scandals and protests. Perhaps the most enduring legacy of these Games will be the increasing emphasis on media distribution caused by the pandemic to diversify the methods and platforms for virtual viewership. The Beijing Olympics were "the most digitally engaged Olympic Winter Games ever."<sup>52</sup> The success of a virtual model in terms of broadcasting, athletic access, and the design of opening ceremony may be the change necessary to rebuild the Olympic Movement with alternative modes of tourism for mega-events in the twenty-first century.

## Notes

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2. Christopher Young, "Olympic Boycotts: Always Tricky," *Dissent* 55, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 68.

3. Maurice Roche, *Mega-Events and Modernity: Olympics and Expos in the Growth of Global Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), 38.

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6. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992).

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12. Thomas Bach, quoted in "Future Host Cities Ready to Draw Inspiration from Marvellous [*sic*] Rio Games," *News*, 28 November 2016, <https://www.Olympic.org>

13. See Zimbalist, *Circus Maximus*.

14. The spelling of the city Pyeongchang was revised with the use of a capital C to market the Winter Olympics. PyeongChang was used in marketing materials to distinguish it from the North Korean city of Pyongchang.

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32. Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2011), 101.
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50. The long-term strategy encompasses a set of recommendations laid out as the “Olympic Agenda 2020 Closing Report,” International Olympic Committee, 4, accessed 24 October 2023, <https://olympics.com/ioc/olympic-agenda-2020>. In 2021, The Olympic Agenda 2020+5 was approved; it builds on the 2020 agenda. The most recent Olympic Charter (2021) incorporates these strategic changes.

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## CHAPTER 6

# Brick Lane and Shakespeare's Globe

### *Street as Performance*

Gretchen Smith

During the last two decades, I have participated in two summer study abroad programs for my university, both in the United Kingdom. Both programs use London as a rich educational source for our American students, whether experienced through guided tours of Parliament or two hours spent freely in the Tate Modern. My course centers on the complex relationship between London and theater starting with Shakespeare and his peers. We not only study theater as an artistic and literary discipline by reading plays and attending performances, but as an industry, a catalyst for national mythmaking, and an essential and routine element of Euro-American city life, including theater's connection to tourism. Central to our discussions is an understanding of theater within an urban space, the exploration of the concept of performance inside and outside the playhouse, and our own status as spectators and tourists relative to this subject.

Throughout the visit, I use exercises to make the students aware of their duality as "tourist" and "performer."<sup>1</sup> In our discussion prior to our field trip to Brick Lane, I use Dennis Kennedy's definition: "To be a tourist is above all to be a willing stranger."<sup>2</sup> The exercise, on its simplest level, consists of walking the street. Brick Lane is approximately one mile south to north; during the walk, landmarks would be pointed out by me or the students, based on the preparation for our visit or on interest sparked during the walk. When we get to the north end of the street, where Brick Lane crosses Bethnal Green Road, we turn and retrace our steps, stopping two-thirds of the way south for dinner in Sheba, one of many restaurants on Brick Lane referred to as "curry houses." Following our visit, the students are assigned to create a personal narrative of the walk in the form of a visual/oral presentation shared with

everyone during class time. My overall goals are that through the combination of visit and analysis students will recognize and witness the layers of history and culture to be found in Brick Lane (one short, urban street) and their own transformation from tourists at the south end, to participants or even performers in the street's life by the end of our few hours' visit.

To focus for a moment on the identity of "the tourist," I acknowledge with my students that this is often recognized as a negative stereotype, one that we strive to erase or mitigate. Tourism as an activity is often regarded as superficial, focused on self-directed pleasure, leisure, and entertainment, where vacation travelers indulge in the kind of packaged tours on a bus or cruise ship that have a "If this is Tuesday, it must be Brussels" structure. Where then does study abroad fit as tourism? For example, are the students in fact tourists if they have come to London to study? Universities require the programming to be "educational"; students want it to be entertaining. Faculty members teaching these programs find themselves caught between these two poles. As one traveling teacher put it, "I found myself uncomfortably pulled between the roles of pedagogue and (unwilling) tour guide."<sup>3</sup>

The reality is that I must be both. The trip to Brick Lane is a great example. With this exercise, I introduce my students to the discipline of performance studies and its fundamental precept that performance studies draws from everyday behavior as well as, and contrasting that to, recognizable performed events within formal spaces like playhouses. I want to persuade them that embodied and social behavior requires observation and recognition and encourage them to examine both normative and subversive responses to processes, narratives, and even geography.

The notion that a walking tour of Brick Lane is a performance and that they are simultaneously spectators and actors requires intellectual (and sometimes physical) adjustment. The exercise is intentionally immersive: we are "in" it, the history, the geography, and the overlapping cultures of Brick Lane. The street (and thus the performance) is all around us. We circle back to and undergo that definition of the tourist as "a willing stranger": in doing the exercise, my students experience their own shift from an arguably Brechtian stance of critical observer to one of consuming (sometimes literally, as in the curry house) and participating with the exhibition and self-presentation of Brick Lane. The tension between their two realities of the moment—"tourist" and "student"—oscillates, which again is integral to the exercise. They *are* tourists, and they *are* students. Those realities resonate for them and inform their spectatorship as we walk.

London and the United Kingdom are somewhat obvious sites for short-term summer abroad programs for American students.<sup>4</sup> For some of our students, a program in the United Kingdom eliminates the potential hazards of navigating an unfamiliar language. More obviously, London, Edinburgh, Bath, and other major UK cities are marketed as rich cultural and heritage sites that provide contextual support for a variety of courses and disciplines. If allowed, students can travel easily within the United Kingdom or to Paris, Amsterdam, Barcelona, Madrid, Lisbon, Berlin, or even more distant geographical locations before, after, or on weekends. In the case of my class, London offers a variety of backstage tours and theater productions throughout the year. Both programs where I teach offer multiple opportunities to take my students out of the classroom and into the streets for live events and historic sites: we attend performances at Shakespeare's Globe, the West End, and the Young Vic, visit the performance galleries at the Victoria & Albert Museum, take backstage tours of Drury Lane and the National Theatre complex, and explore the geography of the Southbank cultural area. The students in these programs are all undergraduates, and some have experience in international travel through family or high school trips. These on-site excursions in London can easily be defined as educational tourism: the point of these visits—each of which has an accompanying assignment—is to transform my student tourists into “locals” of a sort.

Possibly the most interesting exercise among these is our walking tour of Brick Lane.<sup>5</sup> Walking Brick Lane is worlds away from our visit to Shakespeare's Globe the previous week. Students are transformed by both events in different ways. Acknowledging those differences and the different narratives of these two sites and their defined spaces for tourists and tourism gives a clear perspective on our Brick Lane walk and its impact.

## Globe Theatre Visit

Shakespeare's Globe is a complex of buildings, anchoring the tourist trade of the South Bank area. It is centered around a functional replica of the Globe Theatre: the performance venue used by Shakespeare and his acting colleagues during the period from 1599 until his retirement in 1614. Its website notes that the site is “a world-renowned performing arts venue, cultural attraction and education centre.”<sup>6</sup>

Tourism is not new to Shakespeare. The Globe is wreathed with layers

and layers of historical and touristic narratives; its presence signals to many the termination of their search for a kind of truth. Shakespeare-based festivals and geography have attracted visitors in search of both history and entertainment since the days of David Garrick. Throughout the last three centuries, actors and directors, including Garrick himself, struggled to bring an “authentic” Shakespeare to audiences, rejecting previous versions of productions and biographies in favor of their own interpretation of the conditions and conventions that produced Shakespeare and his works. When I say that the Globe is a heritage site, I am recognizing that it stands, in part, as evidence of the lineage of these theater makers as a force shaping their audiences’ understanding of the playwright and his genius, which in turn has led to a preoccupation on Shakespeare, the writer and the canon, as the greatest artistic force in the Western world. Sam Wanamaker’s impulse and struggle to build the Globe on the south bank of the Thames was another version of this impulse to find and capture *the* authentic Shakespeare.

In daily practice, however, the Globe resists such sacred and serious veneration. Like every other successful Euro-American theater or festival, the Globe’s primary goal is to entertain audiences—the same goal held by Shakespeare himself. The original Globe was a commercial theater and succeeded, day by day, by entertaining its spectators through soliloquy, swordplay, and seduction. Today’s Globe, too, is a commercial enterprise—so defined by the complex that surrounds the theater itself as well as the content of its website. Visitors (including tourists, of course) are invited to buy tickets. Within the complex, this tourism can move beyond attending performances to having a meal in the Swan, taking a guided tour, or shopping for tote bags or t-shirts, choices that acknowledge both the authenticity and inauthenticity of Shakespeare’s Globe. And whether pilgrim, tourist, or Londoner, “the paradox of the Globe enterprise . . . is that it has turned [Shakespeare] into one of the most familiar of touristic commodities.”<sup>7</sup>

But in this setting Shakespeare is both serious art and cultural heritage: the Globe stands as the metonym for England’s most famous son. If Shakespeare is performed everywhere on the actual globe, Shakespeare’s Globe is understood by many to be the playwright’s authentic performance space, where his work speaks from the roots of his art leading deep into the London soil and the foundations of Elizabethan theaters. That this complex is a late twentieth-century new building, not located on the original site of the theater (but close!), and the dream-child of an American actor can be brushed aside as unimportant compared to the scripting of the site as Shakespeare’s

authentic residence.<sup>8</sup> The Globe enables educational goals: one can “discover” Shakespeare and his plays, the Globe, Elizabethan theater culture by touring the site, interacting with blogs and podcasts, watching a play, or navigating the website. Tourists can consume as much serious matter as they require, or none at all. The laughter and gasps of the pit may be made significant and authentic by the accompanying scholarship. Recent controversies<sup>9</sup> about style have pointed out that the theater operates within an invisible but strict narrative: Shakespeare, playwright and man, as an extraordinary “storyteller of the British people.” The Globe’s mission is to create an educated spectator by suggesting it is a different kind of historic site, an immersive, interactive museum simultaneously displaying and honoring Shakespeare, Elizabethan creativity, and British culture from a time when Britain’s power dominated the aesthetic and geographical world.

The Globe is an obvious location to take my students for a course based on the long-term relationship between London and theater. Shakespeare’s Globe offers a chance for a multi-layered teachable moment: the complex brings together entertainment, art, and theater history. It is also a recreated site that reaches back across 398 years and connects contemporary London with Elizabethan London.<sup>10</sup> In preparation for our visit, we read and analyze the text of the performance. We discuss the context and conventions of theater within the urban London of Shakespeare’s residency. We examine period maps and images like Johannes de Witt’s drawing of the Swan Theatre. On the day, as we approach the Globe along the Southbank, my students immediately recognize that the theater building within the complex is “historic,” meaning neither modern nor contemporary. They are also aware from our discussion that it is ahistorical; it is not original to the site or preserved authentically through time, but a relatively new building, completed and opened to the public in 1997. It is a building meant to seem, but not be, authentic. Shakespeare’s Globe is “a created heritage structure.”<sup>11</sup>

In recent years I have deliberately bought our tickets for the yard. The yard is the open space between the galleries, which have bench seating, and the raised platform stage. In Shakespeare’s time, the yard or pit was populated by the poorest audience members, referred to as “groundlings,” who might find themselves cheek by jowl with pickpockets and prostitutes. In 2023 as in 1599, groundlings must stand throughout the performance. Their £5 ticket gives them only the right to enter the space; depending on the day, the play, and the weather, the yard may be at capacity or not, and each must find their own spot to stand among the crowd. Increasingly this space has overlapped

with the performance space of the actors: in 2014's *Titus Andronicus* "Roman soldiers" wheeled massive structures through the audience to signal the general's return to Rome, in 2016's *Midsummer Night's Dream* Puck climbed and crawled among those in the Yard while plotting with an onstage Oberon, in 2022's *Much Ado About Nothing* Dogberry and his cops rode bicycles through and blew whistles at the standees with great comic officiousness. Actors onstage play directly to and with those groundlings who are so close. In the summer afternoons or evenings, in the great O of the space, these viewers find a surprisingly intimate connection with the performers onstage. Indeed, the Globe functions best when it embraces its spatial organization by embracing its audience and especially the groundlings. Breaking the fourth wall physically and verbally: that's what we're here for! The conventions that create barriers between spectators and actors are gone in the Globe, both the darkness and the proscenium frame, and the most successful productions use this intimacy—historically or not—to keep the audience enraptured, even across performances that last three or more hours.

This visit and exercise are always fun. Experiencing the O of Shakespeare's reimagined theater, inside and out, is cool. Almost none of my students have been here before, many have never seen a Shakespearean play in live performance, and for a few this is their first live theater performance of any kind. They enter the event and the space as tourists. I ask my students to be conscious consumers as well as tourists. Their field trip assignment requires that they buy a souvenir from the shop for under £3, one that represents Shakespeare and the Globe. They must document "Shakespearean" food or drink onsite. In this area, surprises pop up: a few summers ago, students recorded a barbecue stand making pulled pork sandwiches on demand in the outdoor plaza—clearly American-influenced food. Students must buy a program for the performance. They must find and document a display of donors' names or other financial support. They must write a review of the performance. They must study the audience and analyze its makeup, including obvious tourist or school groups. All of this we discuss in our post-performance class.

## Different Places, Different Tourisms

The Globe field trip poses a direct contrast to our walk on Brick Lane. There are, of course, connections between Shakespeare's Globe and Brick Lane. Both the Southbank of the Globe and the northeast area of Shoreditch close

to Brick Lane were sites of theater performance during Shakespeare's tenure in London. Both areas were outside the London city walls, and thus theaters, banned within the city proper, could be built there. Both theaters thrived in areas that also embraced bear- and bull-baiting rings, brothels, and gambling. James Burbage built *The Theatre* in 1576 on what is now Curtain Road. Both the Lord Chamberlain's Men and the Lord Admiral's Men played there; Shakespeare was a shareholder in the former troupe. In 1599, after a dispute with their landlord, sons Richard and Cuthbert dismantled the theater building and eventually rebuilt it as *The Globe* on the south bank of the Thames, near the Swan and the Rose Theatres. The addition of the Globe helped to establish this area as the center of theatrical activity in London in the 1590s. We know tourists like Johannes de Witt, the Dutchman who visited London around 1596, attended these theaters because he sketched the interior of the Swan Theatre and sent that sketch with a description of these curious structures to his friend Arend van Buchell. Van Buchell's preservation of the sketch and the description has become the only extant imagery of the interior of an English public theater, integral to the very design of the 1997 Globe Theatre.

There are significant differences between Brick Lane and Shakespeare's Globe, too, differences that my students become aware of as we pass along the East End street. Most significantly, Shakespeare's Globe is recognized both physically and anecdotally by almost everyone as a "must see" stop in London, whether one is interested in the art of theater or not. The story of Wanamaker's crusade or the sight of a thatch-roofed, half-timbered, white building or the chance to see "authentic" Shakespeare performances—any of these might be a lure for tourists seeking the enrichment of unfamiliar history, culture, or entertainment while away from home. The complex is ripe with and created for valuable "edutainment."<sup>12</sup> Edutainment as tourism platform acknowledges that, for cultural tourism experiences, education is both necessary and valuable but potentially dull. Thus an event or program requires the seasoning of diversion and enjoyment to indeed qualify as leisure, rather than work.<sup>13</sup>

The question I am almost always asked by fellow faculty and my students is "why visit Brick Lane?" After all, London is full of famous and infamous streets, where world-shaking events and celebrated rulers, heroes, villains, thinkers, and influencers reigned: Brick Lane is not, and never was, at the center of this kind of activity. Nor can it boast the heritage, reputation, or obvious enjoyments of the Globe.

First, Brick Lane is a residential and a commercial street. It has not been

developed, created, or curated as a tourist or heritage site. Like any city street in constant use, transformation and adaptation made across decades and even centuries are visible and present within the street, the traces of which, like geological strata layered within a natural rock wall, show my students how urban spaces evolve over time, leaving behind the residue of previous residents, businesses, and cultures. People live and work in Brick Lane—as they have done for more than six centuries—and a visit like ours is only a moment within the street’s urban landscape. And yet, Brick Lane is acknowledged as “one of the most famous tourist attractions in the East of London.”<sup>14</sup> Commercial East End walking tours that include the street generally focus on three subjects: Jack the Ripper, food, or street art; in the narratives of these tours, the diversity and history of Brick Lane become only a backdrop or footnote.<sup>15</sup> Jack the Ripper walking tours include the site of the Flying Pan, a pub where the first official victim, Mary Nichols, was seen shortly before she was murdered, and the general area of Whitechapel where the murdered women lived, drank, and worked as prostitutes. The street becomes a character within the narrative of the serial killer, representing the generally notorious conditions of poverty and crime throughout the area. Food, both in restaurants and shops, is a rich and diverse cultural resource that brings tourists to the curry houses, competing bagel shops,<sup>16</sup> and recent additions such as Dark Sugars chocolate shop. Tourism is literally consumed. Walking tours focusing on street art guide their members along Brick Lane and nearby streets to see what might once have been referred to as tagging or graffiti but has become big business, thanks to the success of artists like Banksy; the ever-changing images on walls, buildings, and gateways attest to the work of many unknowns as well. Some pieces done by those famous artists are preserved and protected, while most artwork gets painted or papered over by the next set of artists using that space. This version of the walking tour includes sightings where then-poor/now-famous artists lived (or still live). For our purposes, all three (including the Ripper) are only elements contributing to the broader story of the street.

Brick Lane is in the borough of Tower Hamlets, between the city and the docks; the Underground station is Aldgate East. Whitechapel, and the whole East End north of the Thames outside the London city walls proper, was historically known as an area of extreme poverty, social problems, and crime; the most notorious (or noteworthy) moments of crimes include the Whitechapel/Jack the Ripper murders (1880s), Sir Oswald Mosley’s Black-shirt fascist riots (1936), and a nail bomb detonating on the street in a racist

attack aimed at the Bangladeshi community (1999). Recent British television shows like *Ripper Street* (2012–2016) and *Whitechapel* (2009–2013) drew on these elements for the drama and suspense of their narratives.

Brick Lane's 550 years of history are displayed in strata, signs, and deposits, like any good archeological site. The street's fifteenth- and sixteenth-century brickworks were used to build the City of London during the Elizabethan era. The seventeenth-century breweries gradually urbanized an area that was once fields and farms. In the Agas map (1561), the words "the spitel Fyeld" can be seen. Today, Spitalfields is a larger area within Tower Hamlets with Brick Lane running along its east edge. Although it is not identified on the sixteenth-century map, the long, gently curving lane running two fields east of these words suggests the earliest version of Brick Lane: the shape and location of the street in 1561 mirrors the shape of the street today. Later maps reveal how London's borders expanded north and east to embrace and overrun the geography of Spitalfields and Brick Lane's farms, breweries, and brickworks. As I already noted, the first public theaters were built not too far away in Shoreditch. Due to its geographical proximity to the Thames docks, the East End has been a major recipient of immigrant waves from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. Fifty-thousand Protestant Huguenots fleeing from Louis XIV's persecution arrived in England, bringing their master skills in textiles, silk weaving, and fashion; they settled in Brick Lane and nearby Spitalfields.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, Sephardic Jews fleeing the Inquisition arrived in London. In the nineteenth century, Irish workers came to Brick Lane, hoping to escape the potato famine. Ashkenazi Jews, fleeing persecution in Germany and Central Europe, came to the street, continuing the tradition of cloth and clothing manufacture, tailoring, but in fact bringing a variety of trades, crafts, and professions with them. In the mid-twentieth century, immigrants from Bangladesh and East Pakistan started to settle in the street; while some of these arrivals were simply seeking work, some were refugees fleeing the conflicts in the region. Brick Lane and its side streets became a locus for these émigrés. Starting in the 1990s, a different kind of migration has flourished, that of contemporary music and visual artists, which is visible primarily in the northern part of the street, witnessed by the street graffiti, dance clubs, and the explosion of "vintage" clothing and record shops; this "hipster" subculture borderline has been creeping southward as well as both east and west, slowly and steadily redesigning the landscape of Brick Lane, as well as the borders of its internal residents and the economics of rents, goods, and services available. Restaurants and shops like the Cereal Killer

Café (2014–2020) and Jack the Clipper (a chain of Turkish barber shops) epitomized the subculture with its humor and irony, mix of vintage and contemporary style, and commodification of rebellion and alternate lifestyles. As the East End, including Brick Lane, struggled with the increasing gentrification encroachments by affluent young people in the tech, media, and art fields, the fluctuations and skyrocketing of real estate prices, commercial and residential, on and around the street has also impacted the invisible but real borderlines referred to above.

## The Assignment and the Exercise

Before going any further, let me share the exact nature of the classwork and the students' assignment regarding our Brick Lane walk. Prior to the walk, the class read and discussed excerpts on performance studies<sup>18</sup> as well as site-specific readings from *On Brick Lane* by Rachel Lichtenstein.<sup>19</sup> Based on these readings, the students became aware of the ways that behavior, images, and emblems observed during their walk would demonstrate the multiple ways in which urban spaces (and the people within them) record, retain, and show "history"; the exercise was structured as "participant observation,"<sup>20</sup> so that they could become critical observers while on site and yet simultaneously be "a willing stranger" engaged with the street. Ideally, they would also recognize their own performance as consumers and participants within the site and the unfolding event of the walk. Each student was asked to document the diverse historic and contemporary cultures evidenced on Brick Lane, to observe the varieties of performed actions and practices within a shop or on the street during the walk, and to create their own visual-aural narrative of the walk as both a self-aware onlooker and a tourist through images and text.<sup>21</sup> We are actively resisting the role of "a temporary visitor" or "recreational visitors," or "outsiders," in favor of "consumers who desire not merchandise but experience." In class, we analyze each of these terms in depth, and I ask the students to become aware of the complex performance of themselves as tourist within the site of Brick Lane even before we arrive there.

Our walk begins on Whitechapel Road, moving north. This first block of the walk (officially Osborne Street) is almost simply unremarkable, urban London: a narrow, one-way street with narrow, brown brick buildings of two or three stories with contemporary storefronts and businesses at street level. There are chain stores and takeaway shops. Several blocks northward, we note

a change: the street signs are now in both English and Bengali. At the intersection of Brick Lane and Hoptown Street, we see an ornamental gateway or arch, erected in 1997. The gate, as well as nearby streetlamp poles, are painted in the red and green of the flag of Bangladesh. There are now sari shops, South Asian grocery stores, and the first curry houses competing with chain stores and pubs. Many of the people on the street and in shops wear a combination of athletic wear and traditional South Asian clothing; most are men.

At the corner of Fournier Street is the Brick Lane Jamme Masjid or Brick Lane Mosque. The site was originally a place of worship for the Protestant Huguenot immigrants, dating from 1743; as a Christian site, it also housed Wesleyan and Methodist congregations. Then in 1891, the site became the Spitalfields Great Synagogue. In 1976, the building was renovated and reopened as a mosque, now serving the Muslim residents of the area. Looking west down Fournier Street, we can see the steeple of Christ Church Spitalfields, an Anglican church built in the eighteenth century.

As we continue north, more and more restaurants featuring Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Indian cuisine fill the storefronts; the students' first obvious sense of "performance" comes from the curry house greeters, young men who stand in their doorways or the sidewalks in front, working to entice passersby into their restaurants with offers of two-for-one meals, free appetizers, or even free drinks. If the group lingers or someone engages, the offers get more competitive, and the interaction between the men gets more physical—which is all part of the show. They jostle each other, shout louder, maneuver to gain closeness to us, and make more and more extravagant discounts on food and drink. They compliment us and praise the menus of their curry house. The young men wear casual athletic shirts, pants, and shoes with name brands we recognize: Nike, Adidas, Under Armour. We have reservations later at one of the curry houses, Sheba, so their offers get no traction with us, but the exuberant performance is duly noted. Just past Sheba is the Truman Brewery, a key landmark turned multi-use space and vintage clothing market: here, the landscape visibly shifts toward a more contemporary hipster culture. We immediately see larger and more intentional street art (often connected to art galleries), vintage clothing and vinyl record shops, All Star Lanes ("retro bowling lanes, luxury karaoke booths, cocktail bars . . . serving American comfort food"), tech companies, and commercial shops. We also note a change in the people around us. There are more women in the storefronts and outdoor cafes, their clothing has shifted to embrace vintage fashion as well as colorfully dyed hair, tattoos, and piercings. Our walking

tour ends at Bethnal Green Road, right after the dual storefronts of Beigel Shop and Beigel Bake Brick Lane Bakery, competing takeaway shops nearly side-by-side. At the north end, the restaurants are Japanese, Italian, American barbecue, or Syrian, with lots of cocktail bars and a few pubs—but no curry houses and few Bangladeshi locals. We must turn around and retrace our steps to Sheba for our dinner; as we do, like film clips rewinding, we see Brick Lane roll back around us, but this time we are prepared for the shifts from hipster and tech to cultural borderlands to curry houses.

During the walk, I've pointed out the artifacts and signposts of the history and cultures layered into the street: embedded signs and symbols, blue plaques, historic and modern buildings, and lots and lots of street art. We've looked at the people: shopping, walking, working, relaxing outside restaurants, riding bikes or leaning against parked cars, on their phones or live chatting, smoking, and returning our gaze. The students have dutifully photographed and noted sights and sites: the assignment requires them to find objects or people that interest them individually as well as documenting the markers of history and culture. A good part of the assignment rests in their individual exploration: how they observe, record, and structure their reading of the street as a historical, cultural, and performative site, documenting both the site's diversity and their own reactions to that site. I expect them to be analytical, creative, and personal in the same assignment. Success lies as much in being a storyteller as in being an anthropologist.

In their presentations in class, students track their individual "walk" using images and text. Many discuss the language street signs in both English and Bengali, the street art that caught their attention, funny and ironic shops (like Jack the Clipper), and the street life of bodies, cars, and motorbikes. Most of them document the various people they encountered within the categories of "hipster," "tourist," or "local," which often has much to do with how a student sees their own performance within Brick Lane, whether early and late in the walk. They record their own consumerism: our dinner at Sheba, a salt beef bagel from Beigel Bake, or a denim jacket from Rokit. All of this is woven into the student's individual response to the entire event, framed within the lens of performance.

As I said, we're not the only walking tour on the street and not the only tourists sightseeing on Brick Lane. We do stand out a bit, however. Almost every year, our group of twenty-some is primarily college undergrads, most Caucasian, most from Texas, many from small towns. Few of them have traveled extensively or outside the United States, and those who have mostly

traveled with their family; the number of experienced travelers varies each year, but they clearly understand tourism as a practice and a frame for travel. Brick Lane may rank as the most exotic site they've visited and the least obvious tourism event—and I use “exotic” as an apt descriptor addressing multiple meanings and stances. I am primarily pointing out the initial and surface differences between us and Brick Lane (residents and site), difference as “an encounter with the perceived essence of place, its myth and its imaginaries, to which heritage contributes its validating materialisms, its physical evidence of ‘hereness’ and its tokens of ‘authenticity.’”<sup>22</sup> But in truth doesn't the word *exotic* define us in this encounter?

One of my self-identified goals (not necessarily articulated to the students) is that I don't want my students—individually or as a group—to enter this event like Victorian bourgeoisie at the Crystal Palace, lookie-loos staring at the *faux* experience of an Arab sheik's tent or staged exhibit at a Japanese tea garden from their (imagined) status of Western privilege and complacency. Yes, I want them to consciously note the unfamiliar as we encounter it. Yes, I want them to analyze those unfamiliar elements, but with the walk itself I want to move them through analysis and identification into connection, and even to recognize their own performance within the space of Brick Lane in the role of tourists.

Hence the readings and pre-event discussions. However, this may be my anxiety with the exercise's complex outcome: I want to make my students aware of their own gaze being “other” and then flip the notion of subject and object, to interrogate their perceived status as “tourist.” We come there, undeniably, as tourists: “willing stranger[s],” short-term visitors encountering Brick Lane through our gaze “which implies a distance of subject to object.”<sup>23</sup> But are we also, in fact, made aware of that status: it is at moments uncomfortable when the subject of our gaze looks back at us, reminding us we are not invisible. And that we are not the only ones looking. Can we come out the other side as participants, aware of our interaction with the life of Brick Lane? With our readings, discussions, and assignment, I've prepared the students to act as amateur anthropologists and to take a critical stance, one that witnesses and identifies the intersection of histories, cultures, and identities within a small, local geographical space (Brick Lane) and observes those intersections analytically (perhaps especially the overlaps and borders), while also recognizing the street's location within the dominant white, British geography-culture-history of London. The assignment also requires them to take on the role of *flâneur*, Baudelaire's urban creature who writes the nar-

narrative of the city and the street as he walks it, wrapping the narrative around himself as central character: their photo essay will present *their* reading of the walk and the street's life, framed in part through individual interests. Will this include selfies? Of course, though not required. Will it be Instagrammable or TikTokable? For some of my students, it would be impossible to enter the assignment any other way.

We are, of course, subjects as we stroll: Brick Lane's residents study and size up groups like ours from within their own experience. The restaurant greeters are quick to woo us toward their curry houses, and shopkeepers offer free samples in hopes of boosting purchases. Locals hurrying home from work or errands growl and huff when we stop (as a group) to stare at a window or sign because they must shift around us—or even more impatiently *between* undergraduates intent on a piece of street art or a doorway or a shop window. To the residents of Brick Lane, we are obvious outsiders—ergo, tourist: short-term visitors with the luxury of leisure to wander in search of both intangibles (“a desire to experience that which is not us”<sup>24</sup>) and tangibles, the “souvenir object” commemorating the visit, even if it is simply a cloth tote bag from the Brick Lane Bookshop. We are lookie-loos, “intrusively curious onlookers,” a familiar and probably somewhat irritating sight: we walk, we stop, we look, we boomerang or selfie, we snap the residents without their permission, interrupting their lives and supporting their livelihoods. How can we not be identified easily as tourists, from their side of the gaze? Walking Brick Lane, my students hunt for and document different types of cultural performance: evidence of present and past residents, the aesthetic and everyday performance of space, interactions of contemporary local groups, and the authentic narrative of the site. But they also buy Ghanaian chocolates and Jewish beigels and make plans to return on the weekend to the vintage shops in search of a Betsey Johnson dress or leather biker jacket.

### Comparing “Tourist Spaces”

We are welcomed as tourists at the Globe because tourists are their bottom line: the bulk of the theater's spectators are tourists<sup>25</sup> (including UK citizens visiting London) and the most obvious way one becomes educated is through attending a performance of Shakespeare's plays. One visits the theater, eats and drinks there or nearby, buys programs and souvenirs, and watches a play.

That is our contract with this site: we travel to it, wonder at the re-creation, attend the performance and consume the consumables (including the play), participate with the actors as encouraged, and go home. As much as we enjoy the performance and the consumables, the entire experience of Shakespeare's Globe, we as tourists receive the experience and leave, satisfied (or not) with our purchase. Except through extraordinary moments, the tourists do not leave an impact on the space or the event. We are not transformed beyond our tourist status. Even those who pass out from standing too long in the pit with too little to eat or too much to drink are prepared for: the wheelchair and the attendants move with professional haste to remove the impaired spectator (also known as a distraction). Tomorrow will be the same as today, the business of art/tourism will flow as smoothly as it can, like Six Flags or Colonial Williamsburg or the Grand Canyon. We recognize the increasing diversity of the acting company but find little diversity within the pit and tiers. We are not subject to the gaze or the sales pitch, as we are on Brick Lane, nor do we feel like intruders.

Do we leave Brick Lane having the same lack of impact? After a decade of taking students on this walk my answer is: no. Watching how the street itself has changed, with the glacier-like gentrification movement of the hipster/techno culture southward, and the surprising and volcanic upswing of property values in the area both commercially and residentially, and the increasingly large crowds eager to see and buy '70s and '80s "vintage" goods, the Bengali population is being increasingly and relentlessly pushed out. Our visits, like the visits of other tourists, are like drops of water, but rather than being a stone surface we are also aware that a street in 2023 London is the site of constant change and recalibration. That is the destiny of any such location, and we are in our own tiny way one of the agents of change. We have no such impact on Shakespeare's Globe: the 2023 Globe is the same as the 2013 Globe, a statement I cannot make about Brick Lane.

But we are also changed by our encounter with Brick Lane and its residents. In retrospect, I find myself satisfied with the impact of our Brick Lane walk on my students, with the "performative encounter between [my students as] tourists and place."<sup>26</sup> While our time at the Globe may be entertaining and, for most of our students, more comfortable, familiar, and easier to read as "heritage," Brick Lane is not only a performance but an encounter that redefines their own relationship to the urban landscape around them and their internal sense of what being a tourist feels like.

## Notes

1. I am indebted to my colleague Shelley Berg for introducing me both to Brick Lane and her version of this exercise. I am also indebted to my colleague Rachel Ball-Phillips for using a walking tour of Brick Lane in her course. Both variations have helped me refine the preparation, function, and outcomes of my own exercise.

2. Dennis Kennedy, *The Spectator and the Spectacle: Audiences in Modernity and Post-modernity* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 94.

3. Margaret Werry, *The Tourist State: Performing Leisure, Liberalism, and Race in New Zealand* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 15.

4. I taught in our SMU-in-London: Arts program from 2013–2017, and SMU-in-Oxford program starting in 2003–2024.

5. My thanks to the ASTR working group on tourism, which was the original site for this paper in 2021. This paper was an early attempt to connect this exercise more dialogically and visibly with the idea of tourism and performance in order to consider how students make the experiential shift from “tourist” to “local” during the course of this event.

6. The Shakespeare Globe Trust. “About Us.” Website. 2025. <https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/discover/about-us/>

7. Kennedy, *The Spectator and the Spectacle*, 113.

8. The standing argument with Stratford-on-Avon and the Royal Shakespeare Company about which one is the more authentic site relative to Shakespeare continues both on the historical and artistic levels.

9. Specifically, Emma Rice’s shortened tenure as Artistic Director (2016–2018) and its narrative.

10. I use the years of 1599 and 1997 since both are “opening” dates for the Globe.

11. Kennedy, *The Spectator and the Spectacle*, 106.

12. Kennedy, *The Spectator and the Spectacle*, 100.

13. Werry, *The Tourist State*, 15.

14. Chinenye Uzoho, “Brick Lane,” *The River*, n.d., <http://therivermagazine.co.uk/properly/brick-lane.html>

15. Some of the most popular tours can be found at the following websites: *Get Your Guide* (<https://www.getyourguide.com/brick-lane-l29268/walking-tours-tc3>); *Viator* (<https://www.viator.com/London-attractions/Brick-Lane/d737-a6171>).

16. The two shops, The Beigel Shop, known as “the yellow one” for its sign, and Beigel Bake can be found at the north end of the street.

17. “Huguenot Legacy,” *The Huguenots of Spitalfields*, n.d., <https://www.huguenotsofspitalfields.org/huguenot-legacy/>

18. Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2002). I generally assign the first two or three chapters.

19. Rachel Lichtenstein, *On Brick Lane* (London: Penguin, 2008).

20. “Any action that is framed, enacted, presented, highlighted or displayed is a performance,” Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 2.

21. Kennedy, *The Spectator and the Spectacle*, 94–95.

22. Russell Staiff, Robyn Bushell, and Steve Watson, *Heritage and Tourism: Place, Encounter, Engagement* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 10. They are quoting

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 153.

23. Kennedy, *The Spectator and the Spectacle*, 94.

24. Kennedy, *The Spectator and the Spectacle*, 95.

25. Kennedy calls them "recreational tourists" compared to cultural tourists looking for a serious educational experience. *The Spectator and the Spectacle*, 112.

26. Staff, Bushell, and Watson, *Heritage and Tourism*, 9.



## SECTION THREE

# Virtual Stages

### *Immersive Imagination*

Susan Bennett

## Wish You Were Here: On Tourism and Longing

Practices of virtual visitation are endemic to tourism. As Nandini Das and Tim Youngs point out, “Travel narratives have existed for millennia: so long as people have journeyed, they have told stories about their travels,” and it is those stories that have allowed us to imagine places we have never been to or remember ones we have.<sup>1</sup> Until recently, perhaps the most familiar and mundane example of virtual visitation was the postcard, “a mass-produced view of a culturally articulated site,” that in the performance invoked by its receipt “validates the experience of the site, which we now can name as the site of the subject.”<sup>2</sup> The postcard, once delivered, authenticates the sender’s “real” encounter with place by way of the image on the front and their writing on the reverse. The postcard retains the trace of the real and lingers with the recipient as an act of virtual visitation. It embraces both a longing for home and a longing to be elsewhere.

Indeed, the history of the touristic encounter is enmeshed in virtual travel practices. In the nineteenth century, new technologies like the diorama and cyclorama further exploited the market for virtual tourism. Charles Dickens, for example, praised the moving images of the diorama as a “new and cheap means continually being devised, for conveying the results of actual experience, to those who are unable to obtain such experiences for themselves. . . . New worlds open out to them [the audiences], beyond their little worlds, and widen their range of reflection, information, sympathy and interest.”<sup>3</sup> As Humberto Garcia’s chapter, “Sightseeing Tours and Gendered Performances in Georgian London’s Paradisial Gardens” shows us, simulations of the world

elsewhere have been popular for centuries. He describes how the South Bank of London's River Thames, established in Shakespeare's time as the city's entertainment district, was transformed in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries into a site of pleasure gardens, offering visitors the opportunity to encounter a "*Mahometan* paradise in London."<sup>4</sup> Garcia's account of the Vauxhall and Ranelagh Gardens reveals the transgressive possibilities contained in acts of virtual encounter with the Orient. Although scenes of the exotic East had been familiar on the English stage from the beginning of the seventeenth century, these later South Bank entertainment sites mobilized audiences, replacing their passive touristic gaze with embodied participation.

Of course, actual and would-be tourists had long depended on information from narrative accounts of actual or virtual visitation. Mirza Abu Talib Khan Isfahani's "Ode to London" (1803), the subject of Garcia's chapter, belongs in the well-established tradition of literary travel writing. By the early nineteenth century, continued growth in the market for travel prompted the blatantly commercial development of the guidebook, beginning in the 1830s with Baedeker's "condensed detail on the practicalities of travel" and culminating in the Lonely Planet and Rough guides of the late twentieth century targeted at an "independent traveller."<sup>5</sup> Just as print volumes provided a script for acts of visitation, web-based technologies of the twenty-first century have made possible the exponential expansion of expert information along with a democratization of sources. Guidebooks quickly transitioned to websites and apps, but in that act they were supplemented and largely replaced by new user-created content: for example, Tripadvisor (launched in 2000 and now a Nasdaq-listed public company) offered the opportunity for anyone to share their experiences, whether positive or not, to a vast and global online audience of virtual visitors. In a 2023 global poll conducted by Statista, 75% of respondents said their choice of travel destination was inspired by social media content.<sup>6</sup>

The rapid development of tools enabled by web-based technologies has thus transformed acts of virtual visitation into everyday events and provided vital marketing strategies across the tourism industry. Whether visited on a laptop at home or by travel to the authentic site (and then almost certainly armed with the omnipresent smartphone) destinations are commonly promoted by technological means deployed to create in whole or in part the visitor encounter. As Joseph Pine II and James Gilmore point out: "Experience orchestration has become as much a part of doing business as product and process design."<sup>7</sup> Indeed, how places get staged as tourist sites and how

visitors experience those places are now always already mediated by a vast virtual archive ranging from the simple travel blog to thousands of images adeptly curated by a legion of TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram users. The technological turn, then, creates both opportunities and challenges for the visitation marketplace: places must perform on both virtual and “real life” platforms to foster and maintain appeal, as well as to inspire and produce willing investment by consumers. Online materials about a site can activate and/or rekindle interest in visitation and provide a stimulus for consumer desire, but they also require an accuracy (if not authenticity) that ensures the site itself delivers on its promise. The disappointed visitor is as likely, if not more so, to post a review of their experience.

The chapters in this section demonstrate the pervasiveness of virtual visitation. Janine Sun Rogers’s account of militourism illustrates how virtuality proves essential to the production and dissemination of market appeal, and to the scripting of consumer engagement with actual sites. Youjeong Oh’s chapter addresses the specific role of YouTube vlogs in the creation of so-called “one-month living” content and the vitality of this visitation genre at the particular location of Jeju (South Korea’s largest island). In “‘This Place is the Bomb’: Pacific Theaters of Virtual Militourism from Pearl Harbor to *Call of Duty*,” Sun Rogers explores a star-studded marketing campaign for a top-selling World War II-themed video game alongside the development of Pearl Harbor Virtual Reality Tours. Both are motivated to capture a millennial or younger visitor, whose participatory engagement might contribute to a virtual spectacle of war required by and for the profit of the American military-industrial-entertainment complex. Oh’s “One-Month Living Broadcast: Vlog Performances and Contested Visitation in Jeju” looks at the expectations conjured by social media platforms in tethering longer visits to Jeju to a range of freedoms generally denied by the constraints and intensity of Korean employment. Remarkably, Seoul to/from Jeju is the busiest domestic air route in the world—more than 14 million people flew between the locations in 2024<sup>8</sup>—and this popularity surely explains why some visitors are drawn to “residential tourism,” an embodied imagination of what everyday life would be like there. As Oh demonstrates, the one-month visitor enjoys inherent privilege in the act of extended visitation: their daily performances of walking to cafes and exploring the beautiful landscape mark them as very much outside the lived experiences of full-time inhabitants, whose labor supports the one-month visit.

All three chapters suggest the pleasure and excitement that virtual visi-

tation can instill in participants, even as they unveil the inherent artificiality of those experiences—Londoners visiting Vauxhall or Ranelagh immersed themselves in an imagined Islamic paradise; videogamers and virtual reality participants inhabit pixelated war scenes that both imitate and ignore the relentless presence of actual war; the “residential tourists” of Jeju live outside the actual economic conditions of full-time island inhabitants, not to mention the workaday existence on the mainland that they flee. Notwithstanding the cautionary tales these three chapters embed in their accounts, virtual visitation developed deep roots during the pandemic years as, on the one hand, it allowed destinations to showcase what a return to tourism could offer, and on the other, it afforded would-be tourists a locus for their frustrated travel desires. The suddenness and depth of changed circumstances produced, in those populations confined to home, an intensified longing for places elsewhere. In 2019, the tourism industry had accounted for 10.5% of the world’s jobs (334 million) and 10.4% of global GDP (US\$10.3 trillion).<sup>9</sup> In the face of almost overnight devastation, it needed strategies that anticipated resurrection. Osman El-Said and Heba Aziz rightly suggest that this crisis was a singular moment that led to a necessarily wider adoption of technology:

Until recently, museums, heritage sites, and places of touristic interest had been hesitant to allow visitors to comprehensively explore their collections, features, or environments online, because of the underlying fear that digital imitations would dilute the experience, or, worse yet, compete with the actual sites and steal potential visitors away. When COVID-19 put an unavoidable halt to in-person visitations, radical and rapid adaption was needed. It soon became obvious that if these sectors were going to survive, they were going to have to invest in technological innovation—in other words, virtual tours (VTs) became the only product that cultural and heritage attractions could offer during the pandemic.<sup>10</sup>

At least for populations with reliable access to online technology, the pandemic period undoubtedly increased familiarity and ease-of-use with virtual worlds, including touristic ones, and fueled a desire to recover the lost capacity to travel. Virtuality, then, proved crucial to keeping tourism brands in front of their past markets in the hopes of returning to real practice for both producers and consumers.

Given the ubiquity of virtual tourism experiences during the pandemic, it was not at all surprising that, when the dangers of COVID-19 eased and the

possibility of travel returned, tourism rebounded. In 2024, European travel saw a 12% increase over the previous year and, for the first time, exceeded pre-pandemic tourism numbers—so much so that “overtourism” was the year’s “buzzword.”<sup>11</sup> Visitor management has emerged as a post-pandemic priority with some of the most popular destinations “levying tourist taxes, restricting access by location and time, refocusing on sustainability and imposing far stricter regulations on tourist behavior.”<sup>12</sup> Social media has often taken the blame for excess crowding and general rudeness as visitors jostle to capture their own destination experience for Instagram/TikTok/YouTube followers. With record foreign tourist visits to Japan in 2024, one prefecture installed a mesh barrier that blocked a view of Mount Fuji that had become “a viral internet sensation” in an attempt to reduce congestion and improve interactions between locals and tourists.<sup>13</sup> At the Belvedere Palace in Vienna, gridlock in the gallery where Gustav Klimt’s “The Kiss” is on display provoked a ban on artworks in that space and the introduction of “Selfie Kiss,” an adjacent room that encourages visitors to take their coveted shot in front of a replica image—a touristic performance that produces a copy of a copy as virtual evidence of the real thing.

Thus, even with a return to regular travel, the market for virtual tourism has grown, rather than abated. On the one hand, web-based technologies have proven effective tools to build desire and demand for tourist activities, and have become increasingly sophisticated at doing so. On the other, virtual renditions threaten to displace, degrade, and even replace the referent site. Social media posts effectively function as their producers’ proof of (tourist) life and hail their audiences to share in a longing to be there. Images and scenes, static and kinetic, casual and curated, recorded and distributed via social media dominate the experience of contemporary tourism. Virtual visitation is, like tourism proper, burdened by oversupply. It has become so thoroughly commonplace that it is not at all surprising to find Hannah Towey, Associate Editor at Condé Nast Traveler, in an Instagram story on travel trends for 2025, set a return to sending postcards at the top of her list.<sup>14</sup>

## Notes

1. Nandini Das and Tim Youngs, *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1.

2. Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 138.

3. Charles Dickens, “Some Account of an Extraordinary Traveller” (*Household Words*, 20 April 1850), 77.

4. Humberto Garcia, "Sightseeing Tours and Gendered Performance in Georgian London's Paradisical Gardens," in *Staging Visitation: Tourist Performances and Theatricalized Places*, edited by Bryan Schmidt and Weston Twardowski (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2025).

5. Agnieszka Sobocinska and Richard White, "Travel Writing and Tourism," in *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing*, eds. Nandini Das and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 566, 571.

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## CHAPTER 7

### “This Place Is the Bomb”

*Pacific Theaters of Virtual Militourism  
from Pearl Harbor to Call of Duty*

Janine Sun Rogers

On the beach, tousled blonde braids and a bikini are juxtaposed with warships and flaming aerial attacks. Sporting a baseball cap with one strap of her overalls unsnapped to reveal a bathing suit top, starlet Sydney Sweeney pouts and peers down at the camera, framed by palm trees with the sun on her back. Ocean waves and birdsong can be heard. The low angle and grainy footage suggest a mobile phone's front-facing “selfie” lens; a skin-smoothing impression and sparkling effect implies the use of a social media filter. The camera zooms into Sweeney's face before the video starkly changes: the perspective flips and the picture quality sharpens in a disorienting shift as the camera now looks out toward the water. Smoke wafts over Sweeney's snorkeling equipment lodged in the sand; there is a crude barbed-wire fence along the shore and further out still are warships in the water. Sirens are wailing, and the crackle and booms of explosions can be heard. The camera pans up to the sky, and some dozen flaming munitions are falling. The screen fades to black as the sounds of war crossfade into an ironically cheerful tropical jingle; “MILES OF WAR-TORN BEACHES” is displayed in bold yellow text. The video concludes by revealing the advertisement: a shot of the island from a perspective over the water, with planes flying overhead and a hotel erupting into flames; large text spells out the title of the game with the notice “FREE TO PLAY DECEMBER 9TH.” The video lasts 18 seconds in total. Sweeney's caption reads, “this place is the 🌋 #WarzonePacific #CODPartner @CallofDuty.”<sup>1</sup>

This scene, among others, was deployed across social media platforms on

December 8th, 2021—the day after the 80th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attacks—as a dark guerrilla marketing campaign for the *Call of Duty* video game franchise, which was soon to release an expansion wherein players pillage and bomb a fictional Pacific Island dubbed Caldera. Three prominent figures in popular culture contributed to this campaign: actress Sydney Sweeney, socialite Jordyn Woods, and influencer Alex Tienda; harnessing the genre of travel vlogging, each celebrity posted short videos featuring themselves ostensibly enjoying peaceful tropical locales before introducing imagery of militarized violence into the frame. These short videos revealed the uncanny pleasure and pain intertwined in the narrative of the Pacific that persists in the cultural consciousness and material economies of the US imperial project: spectator/participants slip readily into dual roles as tourist-soldiers, suggesting the theatrically interconnected industries of the military, tourism, gaming, and media.

Elsewhere on the Internet, veteran Jack Moore relives the horrors of the Pearl Harbor attacks to advertise one of Oahu's hottest tourism experiences: the Pearl Harbor Virtual Reality Center. The 2-minute YouTube video "Pearl Harbor Unveils Virtual Reality Tours" features Pearl Harbor survivors like Moore peering through Google-branded virtual reality goggles as they gasp and reel at battleships going up in flames and enemy planes screeching through the skies. "A rich 75-year history now made for millennials!" is how Pacific Historic Parks, the nonprofit organization behind the Pearl Harbor National Memorial and other commemorative sites in the Pacific, characterizes the Virtual Reality Center.<sup>2</sup> As human tour guides, audio tours, and in-person interactions may fade in desirability for a new generation of tech-immersed tourists, virtual reality has surfaced as a novel solution to reach tourists who can either opt to engage on-site (donning VR goggles and perching on swivel chairs) or from anywhere via mobile apps for the iPhone and Android. Memorial visitors, virtual or otherwise, can now do more than passively gaze at pictures or listen to stories: they can slip on headsets and find themselves standing in the line of fire, stumbling across the deck of a battleship, flying in an enemy plane. The Pearl Harbor Virtual Reality Center offers an opportunity to move beyond spectatorship, promising to immerse visitors as active agents in horrors of the past—and make it fun.

In this essay I critique what I term virtual militourism, a mode of staging visitations to militarized sites facilitated by technologies that allow for virtual embodiment. This form of visitation thrives in a global multi-platform, user-participatory media economy. It constructs and serves imperial fantasies that

intertwine glamor, violence, and power, while also numbing ethical concerns and colonial guilt through the dissolution of material presence and embodied participation. Working with feminist scholar Teresia Teaiwa’s theorization of Louis Owens’s term of militourism, this critique examines how the Pacific world is virtually constructed as a passive battleground of touristic indulgence, concealing the histories, presence, and futurities of Indigeneity and sovereignty in the Pacific. Militourism, Teaiwa observes, is a process in which civilian tourism can function as a tour of duty, reinforcing militarism through sightseeing practices. This entanglement of pleasure, power, and violence in the militarized tourist both showcases and mystifies military power, while also depoliticizing history—such as perpetuating colonial fantasies of a feminized, exotic Pacific and echoing Orientalist and racialized perceptions of Indigeneity.<sup>3</sup> The interactivity of VR and gameplay here intertwine with the entangled projects of military control and tourist industries particular to the Pacific world. Gaming itself can be considered a touristic activity: as argued by media theorist Nicolle Lamerichs, video games invite players to take on a tourist’s role as spectator and adventurer, simultaneously encountering and building spaces through the performance of action and the production of affect in specific virtual localities.<sup>4</sup> In the case of militarized sites, extended here to the virtual geographies of the Pearl Harbor Virtual Reality Center and *Call of Duty’s* Caldera, interactive media becomes a gamified training ground wherein civilian participants may rehearse historic acts of militarism. Examined through the lens of virtual militourism, the marketing and gameplay of *Call of Duty: Warzone Pacific* and the commemorative experience of VR films from Pearl Harbor’s Virtual Reality Center reflect how militaristic ideologies are staged through intertwined simulation technologies in tourism and gaming. Such a process is timely, and a critical examination of it is urgent, against the context of the ongoing militarization efforts in the contemporary Pacific.

## Historical Configurations and Contemporary Context of Pacific Militourism

Hawai‘i has long been staged and fashioned in accordance with US tourists’ racialized desires and anxieties, particularly in terms of US relationality to Indigeneity and the Pacific world. As Margaret Werry describes in *The Tourist State: Performing Leisure, Liberalism, and Race in New Zealand*, tourism reflects a certain “cultural poetics” in terms of how the leisure practices of

liberal individuals intersect with larger questions of state control and policy.<sup>5</sup> Jane Desmond likewise explores how racialized performances of hula and luaus configured Hawai‘i as “a side of white Edenic regeneration,” featuring Native Hawaiians as primitive and unchanging counterpoints reaffirming white tourists’ modernity, and *hapa haoles* (people of mixed white and Hawaiian descent) as ideals of cultural hybridity.<sup>6</sup> Touristic performance and spectatorship, in this sense, determine a social categorization of racialized bodies that in turn naturalizes Hawai‘i’s place as a strategic Pacific outpost subordinate to the US mainland. In the wake of attaining statehood in 1959, and throughout the Cold War and Civil Rights era, tourism in Hawai‘i was part of a racial and ideological mission: Sarah Miller-Davenport suggests that during this time, “to visit Hawai‘i was to partake in a nationalist project that advanced both American foreign policy and the negotiation of racial difference at home.”<sup>7</sup> Postwar tourism in Hawai‘i leaned more heavily into multiethnic and Asian racialization, indulging white tourists’ ideas that visiting a multiethnic paradise could teach one something about race relations back on the mainland, while also spreading good American cheer amid Cold War conceptions of an Asia-Pacific region at risk of tilting Red. These modes of visitation were animated by a sense of “aloha spirit,” which, according to Keiko Ohnuma, obscured historical traumas and served “as both a social lubricant and glue, sticking people together while deflecting attention from the problems of proximity.”<sup>8</sup> The “aloha spirit” occluded problematic associations with an extractive tourism economy, colonial dynamics, or traumatic histories.

While the above studies concern embodied, fleshly encounters of the twentieth century, my critique traces the ways in which virtual militourism contributes to the US military project as civilians continuously reperform militarized histories to produce touristic pleasure and leisure. This consideration extends James Der Derian’s notion of the military-industrial-media-entertainment complex beyond virtual and gamified training of professionalized soldiers to soldiering civilians as well. Just as troops develop a desensitized distance from military combat through virtualized training materials, civilian gamers and spectators undergo a similar process as they virtually tour militarized scenes.

The sites considered in this chapter contribute to contemporary militarized efforts to gain control in the Pacific. As tensions rise between the United States and China in what some have described as a “Second Cold War,” the Pacific world is under a particular spotlight as an anxious liminality between the US and a threatening Orient. The US has concurrently strengthened its

military presence in the Pacific, opening its first new base on Guam in 70 years, establishing embassies in Pacific nations to counter China’s influence,<sup>9</sup> and securing access to Philippine bases near Taiwan and the South China Sea.<sup>10</sup> Considering this context, the utilization of new media to influence civilian affect concerning narratives of military activity in the Pacific merits attention to understand the United States as a contemporary colonial force.

This chapter considers two case studies: the 2021 guerrilla marketing campaign for *Call of Duty: Warzone Pacific* and the VR experiences of the Pearl Harbor Virtual Reality Center as they marry the genres of social media travel influence, war gaming, and commemoration. These virtual visitations intertwine touristic leisure and militarized violence, or what I term virtual militourism, to appeal to contemporary fixations and imaginings of the Pacific World. The *Call of Duty: Warzone Pacific* campaign invites civilians to touristically engage in militaristic simulations of a fantastical “Pacific theater” that conflates sites of battle with glamor, pleasure, and play. By casting the viewer as a tourist/soldier, *Call of Duty: Warzone Pacific* and the Pearl Harbor Virtual Reality Center’s VR experiences invite civilians to step into the boots of military troops for participatory entertainment, thereby producing a militarized public and valorizing colonial expansion. The *Call of Duty* franchise and Pacific Historic Parks nonprofit are thus situated in the military-industrial-media-entertainment-network, joining propagandistic war films and increasingly virtual forms of military training as a multi-platform project that intertwines social media with gaming practices to cultivate militarized consent from the civilian public. These cases indicate a wider turn to virtual experiences that reflect, stage, and build collective colonial mythologies of an exoticized Pacific world as a site of leisure.

### “This Place Is the 🌋”: Influencer Invasion

Many first stumbled upon *Call of Duty: Warzone Pacific*’s guerrilla marketing campaign through actress Sydney Sweeney’s post appearing in their social media feed. Known at the time for her work in the HBO series *The White Lotus*, itself a commentary on whiteness, affluence, and colonial afterlives set in a Hawaiian resort, it was not an unusual sight for the starlet to be posed in a tropical locale. However, two similar videos appear on X (Twitter at the time of posting) from socialite Jordyn Woods and travel blogger Alex Tienda. Woods, who rose to fame through association with the Kardashian-

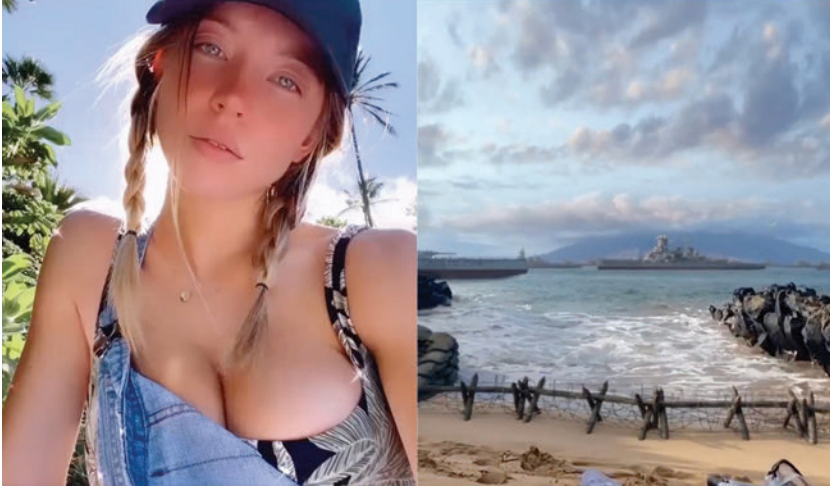


Figure 7.1. At left: Sydney Sweeney poses in an ad on her Instagram feed. At right: a battleship from the same ad. Screenshots by the author.

Jenner family, captioned her video “.@Karltowns can’t keep up with me here on Caldera Island 📍🎮 #WarzonePacific #CODPartner @CallOfDuty,” which is ostensibly filmed by the tagged basketball star Karl-Anthony Towns as he bikes down a wooden bridge flanked by stilted grass huts. The scene opens with the disconcerting sight of a bike basket filled with hand grenades before panning up to reveal Woods peacefully biking ahead of Towns. As soon as Woods settles into the frame, two low-flying jets swoop in, dropping bombs into the water mere feet away from Woods. As with Sweeney’s video, the screen then fades to black with yellow text, this time cheekily reading, “FEEL THE WIND IN YOUR CROSSHAIRS,” before the same shot of the beleaguered island with text announcing the upcoming video game launch. Calypso music plays throughout the 26-second video, punctuated by the sounds of bombing.<sup>11</sup>

Tienda’s 15-second video is even simpler. Dressed in brief jean shorts and a Hawaiian shirt with bleached blond cropped hair, Tienda is seen from behind, strolling down a dock, with a lush island looming out before him. There is a moment of peace and birdsong before the roar of planes fades in, and a fleet of jets fly past him, firing at one another. When Tienda’s video fades to black, yellow text grimly reads “VIEWS TO DIE FOR” before fading again to the standard *Warzone Pacific* announcement.<sup>12</sup>

Each of these short videos engages the same dramatic structure: an innocuous travel vlog depicting a slice of tropical vacation, a jarring reveal of violent military activity coolly recorded by a steady influencer’s hand, a fade to a black background with a sardonic slogan reminiscent of touristic advertisements (“Views to Die For,” “Feel the Wind in Your Crosshairs,” and “Miles of War-Torn Beaches,”), and a final shot delivering the game title and release date.<sup>13</sup> Each post elicits lively user engagement: “Enlisting for you now ma’am,” tweeted one user in response to Sweeney, along with a picture of a young boy saluting;<sup>14</sup> “This is so camp,” tweets another.<sup>15</sup>

“Welcome to Paradise,” boasts *Call of Duty’s* webpage advertising the game. As characters drop in during actual gameplay, the on-screen details simply list the location as “Caldera Island, The Pacific.” Certain elements of the game map (the constructed virtual space on which players battle) elicit wide-ranging associations of the Pacific world, ranging from the generically aesthetic (palm trees, bamboo huts, and paddies emerge through yellow haze) to the historically, materially, and politically specific. There are certain landmarks, or “Points of Interest” in-game, that refer to real-world Hawai‘i: the Caldera Royal Cabana Resort sports the same pink patina and iconic bell tower as the Royal Hawaiian Hotel; the Caldera Capital resembles downtown Honolulu’s Ali‘iolani Hale building, which houses Hawai‘i’s State Supreme Court; Caldera Peak was likely inspired by Haleakalā Observatory, which similarly sits atop a dormant volcano; the red-and-white control tower at Caldera Terminal resembles the Ford Island Control Tower at Pearl Harbor. The Caldera map also features a massive interactive phosphate mining operation, resonating with the fact that the Pacific islands of Nauru and Banaba have been strip-mined for phosphate to the point of environmental disaster.<sup>16</sup> The game map, altogether, sets the stage as a touristic playground wherein gamers may consume, explore, and destroy iconic Pacific landmarks.

As Elizabeth W. Son describes, legacies of military sexual violence are reimagined and embodied through acts of performance; likewise, these videos rehearse a certain notion of sexual conquest, conflating a touristic promise of pursuing young women with military dominance of a region.<sup>17</sup> The promotional videos featuring Tienda, Woods, and Sweeney function similarly, melding glamor and violence to reflect and promote contemporary militouristic notions of the Pacific world. By posting near the anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attacks, for instance, they reframe the historical event; as Sweeney dons her bikini and gazes alluringly into the camera, she activates notions of the Pacific as a site of conquest. Woods’s perspective while pur-

sued by her cameraman similarly evokes an eroticized chase; and Tienda, filmed from behind swaggering down a dock, alludes to a masculine conquest of the land. As James Der Derian discusses in *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment-Network*, forms of virtuality are increasingly pertinent elements of military efforts, especially in training simulations, demonstrating that virtual engagement with war efforts is a standing practice that produces novel orientations toward war and the perpetration of violence. This move to virtuality cultivates a desensitization to and disidentification with acts of war as soldiers are trained not only to commit such acts, but to develop distance from them. This interplay of militarism, gaming, and the virtual is an ongoing negotiation: game developers get tapped to develop software for virtual military training development, introducing video games into what Der Derian terms a military-industrial-media-entertainment network.<sup>18</sup> Beyond the conjoined interests of the state military and private defense suppliers that perpetuate overseas involvement, the information industry and cultural producers work to cultivate affect and manufacture consent regarding military projects. As soldiering moves to virtual and mediated realms, tension between the representations and realities of war renders military violence increasingly unreal, trivial, and inevitable. *Call of Duty: Warzone Pacific* demonstrates how leisure economies conflate the aspirational imagery of touristic pleasure with the abject catastrophe of war, perpetuating old colonial myths and building a generation of new ones for the Pacific world.

## (Re)Visiting Pearl Harbor in VR

“I looked up into the sun and I said to myself, this is going to be my last day alive,” recounted veteran Jack Moore as he tested one of the Pearl Harbor Virtual Reality Center’s VR tours.<sup>19</sup> The Pacific Historic Parks’ brief video advertisement featured Moore wheeling about in a “Pearl Harbor Survivor” sailor cap with a lei around his neck, clutching goggles to his face as he revisited his experience of Pearl Harbor. The advertisement demonstrates a level of authenticity that brings a veteran back to the battleground, a visceral experience that leads him to startle and flinch, but not to the point of retraumatization. For those enticed by such a scene, the Pearl Harbor National Memorial offers a suite of experiences that allow one to travel across time and inhabit the boots of those like Moore who experienced the Pearl Harbor attack first-



Figure 7.2. The virtual reality theater. Image by the author.

hand. These tours utilize virtual reality technology to transform tourists into spectator-participant-visitors; plugged into a headset and devoid of distraction, the tourist gets visually immersed in the VR films, while simultaneously experiencing a degree of agency through the first-person 360-degree view. The Pearl Harbor Virtual Reality Center, like *Call of Duty*, provides an encounter wherein participants gain a certain level of first-person control over their experience; it similarly combines with a familiar tourist site to conflate leisure, duty, education, and militarism.

Amid views of swaying palm trees, lapping water, and architect Alfred Preis’s expressive USS Arizona Memorial in the distance, tourists experience the VR films in an open-air, roped-off section of the Pearl Harbor memorial site. Upon checking in, an employee leads the participant to her seat: a cushioned swivel stool, as the swivel is essential to preserve mobility in 360-degree view. Employees provide VR headsets and noise-canceling headphones that completely block out all sounds and sights of the outside world. There are four films available, each roughly 7 minutes in length; depending on the level of ticket purchased by the visitor, they may view either one of the

films, or all four in succession. All four films were 3D animation, rendered with enough detail to clearly make out actions, facial features, and some textures, yet without graphic depictions of destruction or violence.

The first two films featured events leading up to and during December 7, 1941 at Pearl Harbor. The first, entitled *Air Raid*, primarily portrayed the US point of view: a voiceover guided the viewer through the morning's events and narrated the surprise attack from various areas around the port and island, generally utilizing a floating bird's-eye view. The second film, *Skies Over Pearl*, similarly utilized a voiceover while offering information on the Japanese military's strategy, positioning viewers inside the Japanese planes in flight to demonstrate the various aircraft and explosives used. The third film, *Walk the Deck*, took on a more avant-garde stylization: through an eerie soundscape of falling bombs, missiles, and explosives, and without verbal narration, the film slowly walked the viewer through the decks of a seemingly abandoned US battleship. While the viewer could spin about and take in wreckage and fires throughout the harbor, or look up to see planes in the sky, the camera's point of origin uncannily proceeded down its track across the decks of the ship. The final film, *Explore the USS Arizona*, took place underwater as a tour of the USS Arizona, a large warship that sank amid the attacks with over a thousand troops trapped and killed within.

Throughout each film, the participant takes on various loaded perspectives and positions. In *Air Raid*, for instance, the participant finds herself on the ground with troops at a radar tower as a narrator describes the US military's failures interpreting signs of the impending attack, tacitly implicating the viewer through the staging. In *Skies Over Pearl*, the participant finds herself at varying times seated at the front of a Japanese plane while watching informative illustrations in the sky; if participants swivel around to look to the back of the plane, they are greeted with stony-faced Japanese troops seated behind them as a grim reminder of their virtual positions as enemy troops. The voiceovers and narratives of these two films refrain from any explicit moral judgment of the Japanese position. Instead, the films make space for tourists to explore and project their own interpretation onto the situation, thereby granting the experience of developing their own intellectual and emotional perspectives in addition to their literal visual viewpoints. While participants are offered a sense of agency by inhabiting a position in the film's world and directing their gazes independently, viewers are ultimately unable to intervene or act in any way that interferes with the narrative's outcome. These framing choices invite participants to reflect inwards: how might it

feel to participate in this historical event on either side of the conflict? As the didactic voiceover and diagrams guide tourists’ understandings of the event they viscerally embody a foot soldier’s experience of knowing, contributing to, and bearing witness to war without questioning or influencing its path.

*Walk the Deck* and *Explore the USS Arizona* produce radically different spaces as the participant travels through the deck of the USS Arizona during active fire, and swims through its shipwrecked remains, respectively. There is no voiceover throughout *Walk the Deck*; the participant is moved through the ship in silence punctuated by the sounds of munitions soaring and exploding while she is left to decipher the layout of the ship herself, which remains intact and devoid of any trace of other humans throughout the film. *Explore the USS Arizona*, on the other hand, does feature a voiceover that guides the participant through an underwater tour of the wreckage. *Explore the USS Arizona* features more specific details of the ship as well as traces of human life—a pair of eyeglasses, a glass bottle—compared to the relatively sparse depiction in *Walk the Deck*. These two films contribute an intensified emotional and aesthetic experience to the suite of films, drawing participants into a more vulnerable position. Rather than viewing from the bird’s-eye view of a cockpit, participants are walked through the battleground and drifted through wreckage. While they retain some agency in the sense that they can swivel their heads and gaze around, this sort of agency is something of an illusion as the film and its events play on.

The Pearl Harbor Historic Sites website claims Pearl Harbor to be the top visitor destination in Hawai‘i, as of 2023 attracting around 2.5 million visitors yearly.<sup>20</sup> Visitation to Hawai‘i is thus frequently, perhaps normatively, intertwined with a sense of duty and remembrance regarding the US military project. The VR film is able to accomplish a particular kind of immersion that speaks to the tourist condition (as one who visits and learns but does not expect to contribute) and brands remembrance and education as entertainment. This kind of tactile and immersive experience is therefore situated in a matrix of militaristic, capitalist, and consumptive interests that produces a civilian tourist-soldier as she performs in a tourist’s tour of duty, moving beyond her physical body to contribute to a national project of remembering and restaging narratives of war. This type of performance resonates with Scott Magelssen’s notion of *simming*, an action that references another action in an attempt to reproduce or try out an aspect of the world.<sup>21</sup> Magelssen argues that this sort of immersive simulation produces what memory studies scholar Alison Landsberg terms “prosthetic memory,” a phenomenon in which his-

torical narratives are personally and empathetically appropriated by those who engage with experiential media.<sup>22</sup> In this sense, Pearl Harbor's Virtual Reality Center rehearses a war event in order to perform an act of witness, commemorating and reifying Pearl Harbor as a site of national trauma. The Pearl Harbor Virtual Reality Center thus contributes to an epistemic project of transmitting historical knowledge via tactile and sensuous means, toward the ends of war commemoration. By situating the public in an immersive, participatory context, the Center's suite of VR films induce empathy and identification in a way that continues the legacy of the Pearl Harbor attack. By opting in, participants perform the work of soldiering as they engage in this act of commemoration via simulation. These VR films produce a space where the past is not just remembered but virtually inhabited, inviting participants to embark on a virtual tour of duty as they negotiate tactile and immersive forms of remembrance.

### Playing in the Pacific Theater of Virtual Militourism

The above case studies of *Call of Duty: Warzone Pacific* and the Pearl Harbor Virtual Reality Center contribute to a process of militarization through cultural technologies that influence civilians to adopt militarized ideas such as the virtue of state power, the prioritization of national security, and the necessity of overseas intervention. These cases join a legacy of media that enact the work of militarization by infiltrating the home and the mind via consumer goods, media diets, and everyday rituals, thereby producing a charged sense of intimacy between civilian consumers and notions of war. The proliferation of militarized shooter games is an overt example of this operation, as such games invite players to engage in embodied simulations of war and enact narratives of valorized violence on the battlefield. Touted as "the world's best-selling video game franchise" as of summer 2022, *Call of Duty* is a key player in the war game ecosystem, having distributed over 425 million copies across a franchise spanning storylines within both World Wars, the Vietnam War, the Cold War, outer space, and zombie invasions. The *Warzone Pacific* title alone boasted over 150 million monthly users in March 2021. *Call of Duty* has achieved global prominence around the world, domesticating narratives of war's brutality, and producing pleasure around militaristic violence that reinforce colonial mythologies.

As Cynthia Enloe claims, "the military is only one part of the story of militarization."<sup>23</sup> Civilian actors may participate just as much in the reinforce-

ment of military values and priorities. Her feminist critique is salient to the deployment of tourist figures and perspectives in the *Warzone Pacific* advertisements that cast Sweeney, Woods, and Tienda as glamorized inhabitants of the militarized geography, subverting notions of what it means to be under fire; the falling munitions are simply set dressing, adding a charged sense of intrigue to the exotic environment. These advertisements conflate participation in the war effort with vacationing alongside the attractive influencers. The ads suggest that players may enlist as soldiers not necessarily to protect vulnerable civilians, but perhaps to leisure alongside them as well. While this sense of pleasure and eroticism is not as explicit in the Pearl Harbor Virtual Reality Center, the same domestication of war's violence is still salient; as a top visitor destination, Pearl Harbor holds a place as a key memory when touring Hawai'i with loved ones, imbuing the practice of intimate leisure with participation in the project of military remembrance.

The Pearl Harbor Virtual Reality Center reframes the act of commemorating December 7, 1941 as an interactive multimedia experience in order to fabricate a form of remembrance that simulates a level of agency through its immersion and participatory nature, without the option to meaningfully interact or enact change. *Call of Duty*, meanwhile, evokes ambiguous histories of violence in the Pacific that are conflated with valorized, eroticized, and masculinist conquest. Pearl Harbor is "one of the few events that most people could put a date to" according to Daniel Immerwahr, and its monumentality has historically concealed attacks across the Pacific beyond Hawai'i.<sup>24</sup> The Pacific theater is thus mischaracterized as a singular breach, suppressing histories of injury in other Pacific Islands and the backlash and incarceration of Japanese Americans as a result of Pearl Harbor. In turn, this mischaracterization is aestheticized, narrativized, and gamified through virtualized forms of visitation.

Tourism is exceedingly virtual in that the material experience of visitation intersects with flows of information coming from afar. As Katherine Hayles posits, "virtuality is the cultural perception that material objects are interpenetrated by information patterns."<sup>25</sup> Any touristic site is laden with meaning collected from various impressions: data mined from movies and television, social media, literatures, stories from friends and family, and other mediated experiences. Virtual constructions of the Pacific, as in *Call of Duty* and the Pearl Harbor Virtual Reality Center, carry historical stakes. As a storied battleground and site of past (and continuing) colonial domination, there is political value in repeating and revising colonial mythologies of the Pacific, and the methodological harnessing of technologies does so in increasingly

immersive and mediatized ways. These modes of visitation perpetuate an understanding of military projects as virtualized and anesthetized work in a way that is historically specific to a new age of militarized labor.

Tourists produce their own knowledge regarding the geography that they visit, and distribute such knowledge through a variety of media: posting or writing for public consumption or through the private archiving of experiences using digital means. The proliferation of such practices renders multimedia marketing campaigns and touristic experiences legible: the familiarity of digitally-mobilized travel documentation produces the feedback loop that negotiates between cultural memory, material embodiment, digital media, and colonial myth-making. The social media formulation that characterizes *Call of Duty* advertisements produces a condition of virtuality that indoctrinates and militarizes: the glamorous travel vlogger is on the beach, the beach is in the Pacific, the Pacific is subject to Western military might, military might is a spectacle, and the spectacle is glamorous.

*Call of Duty: Warzone Pacific* and the Pearl Harbor Virtual Reality Center richly demonstrate the implications of new media in tourism as a point of militarization. As the *Warzone Pacific* clips juxtapose scenes of glamorous tourism with abject warfare, it mobilizes the genre of travel vlogging for social media to appeal to ambivalent pleasures of the colonial spectator, and contributes to colonial myth-making projects concerning the Pacific world. The Pearl Harbor Virtual Reality Center likewise speaks to the desires of tourists by turning to experiential and virtual means to participate in the commemoration of US military history. These militouristic spectacles contribute to a trend of virtualized war efforts and a resulting moral ambivalence surrounding violence and disaster, building a feedback loop of virtualized conditions specific to the US colonial project in the Pacific.

## Notes

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## CHAPTER 8

# One-Month Living Broadcast

### *Vlog Performances and Contested Visitation in Jeju*

Youjeong Oh

This chapter explores the practices of “one-month living (*handalsalgi* in Korean)” in Jeju, South Korea. One-month living means residing in a single travel destination for approximately one month with the desire to experience living like a local. If the default mode of traveling feels like quickly consuming and passing through a place, a one-month stay suggests an intention to more fully explore it, engage with its diverse characteristics, and connect intimately with the site. As people choose to temporarily escape from Korea’s fast-paced and competitive urban life, *handalsalgi* is similar to “lifestyle migration,” defined as “the spatial mobility of relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or full-time to places that are meaningful because, for various reasons, they offer potential of a better quality of life.”<sup>1</sup> Unlike migration, however, one-month living seeks a temporary change in one’s environment without reconfiguring basic aspects of life such as residence, economic activities, and human relationships. One-month living is often dubbed “residential tourism,” “living daily life like travel,” “living like a local,” and “slow living.” One-month living illustrates the “touristification of everyday life” in which the divide between extraordinary experiences and the routines of “ordinary” lives have become blurred.<sup>2</sup> It also resembles multiple aspects of *new urban tourism*<sup>3</sup> in that it challenges the boundaries between destinations and fields of living.

Intriguingly, many one-month stayers film their daily lives and share the videos on social media platforms. This chapter examines why these travelers choose to broadcast their visitations to the public, and how such mediatization reconfigures their experiences. I focus in particular on a collection of vacationers who create vlogs on YouTube, which has emerged as the dom-

inant platform for circulating niche one-month living content. Vlogs are single-person media where the creator controls the entire process of content creation including planning, filming, editing, and uploading; the author also plays the role of performer for the content.<sup>4</sup> Vlogs are public spaces for self-expression and performing identity. Once televised, the one-month living experiences become public. Drawing inspiration from Erving Goffman's theories on the presentation of self, which suggest that individuals perform insofar as they have an audience, this chapter explores one-month visitation as a performance of identity and lifestyle.

Applying a theatrical metaphor to everyday life, Goffman divides social participants into actors and audiences. Actors assume the roles of their chosen characters, while audiences assess the performances of actors and gauge the authenticity of their characters. Front stage performance allows actors to manage and maintain impressions with the audience. If everyday life is a stage for performance, then there must also be a "backstage" where individuals cease performing. Goffman suggests that this "backstage" is where one's true self gets revealed, because there is no audience.<sup>5</sup> One-month stayers leave for Jeju in search of their real selves, taking time to contemplate their lives, searching for "backstage." But once they film and present their lives in Jeju in the form of a vlog, they create a new stage for self-performance. Thus, the visitors' performances differ from the conventional tourist performance, which often exoticizes and commodifies Indigenous or local cultures for a politically dominant external audience.<sup>6</sup> Instead, it centers on the performance of the visitors themselves, using the local place and its people as a backdrop to present their identity to an external (vlog) audience. This chapter examines how these new performances of subjectivity unfold, and explores their broader impacts.

The first part of the chapter explores the motivation behind *handalsalgi* as an escape from oppressive urban governance, where individuals strain under neoliberal socio-economic pressures for productivity, hyper-competition, and continuous growth. Following Victor Turner, I claim that one-month living can be helpfully understood as a liminal state with the potential for developmental transformation, physically and psychologically separated from the oppressive urban environment.<sup>7</sup> The second section traces visitors' identity/lifestyle performances in Jeju, attending to how their pursuit of an authentic self gets broadcast to an anonymous audience via web media. I contend that subjects of these lifestyle performances are not pre-fixed and static identities, rather, they are under a process of constant formation in relation with both

one-month visitation and the vlog genre. The essay's final part sheds light on Jeju itself, focusing on how vlogs often reduce the place and its history to simply a background for lifestyle performance. Jeju is the most popular tourist destination in South Korea, and its tourism imaginaries are built around aesthetic attributes like remoteness, exoticism, and pristineness. I examine how the identity/lifestyle performances by one-month stay vloggers neglect, distort, and erase the lived realities of Jeju, only reproducing conventional tourism imaginaries. Rather than developing a true sense of belonging and engagement to the place, one-month immersion eventually leads to consuming Jeju in shallow and fleeting ways.

To begin, I wish to briefly provide some historical and geographical context on Jeju.<sup>8</sup> Jeju (Cheju) is the largest island and smallest province in South Korea. As a semi-subtropical island and "internal periphery,"<sup>9</sup> Jeju is often treated as analogous to Hawai'i or Okinawa. The most critical event that has defined Jeju in its modern history is the April 3rd Uprising and Massacre. During the US military occupation (1945–48), Jeju people rose up to oppose the separate elections in northern and southern Korea that led to the division of the country. The April Uprising, or the so-called *April 3rd Incident* (4.3), was brutally suppressed, resulting in the massacre of as many as 60,000 Jeju residents, and the exodus of 30,000 islanders to Japan.<sup>10</sup> While Jeju still carries collective trauma from that state violence, the April Uprising's haunting extended even longer, since survivors were condemned as the "Red Revolts" during anti-communist state-building in the post-Korean War period.

Political oppression was followed by economic extraction that, ironically, came with the "development" of Jeju. Under the banner of promoting Jeju as an international tourist destination, a series of state-led tourism projects were imposed on it. Tourism development—the ways in which (mostly mainland) capitalists built hotels, resorts, golf courses, museums, theme parks, and other facilities—dispossessed Jeju people of their private, ancestral, and communal land, collective resources, and autonomy. Since tourism operators and local "hosts" are separate entities, profits from the industry are usually drained from Jeju, creating an extractive structure. As Jeju's economy came to increasingly rely on the fluctuations of tourism and external capital, it also became incapable of developing a self-sufficient economic structure.<sup>11</sup> Simultaneously, Jeju's local culture—its unique dialect, cuisine, folklore, and myth—was commodified as a tourism asset. To complement material extraction, the tourism narratives of Jeju have been crafted to highlight characteristics of exoticism, aesthetics, and pristine beauty. One-month stayers' vlog perfor-

mances frequently utilize and reproduce the existing tourism imaginaries of Jeju, only perpetuating its position as a tourist periphery.

I conducted a preliminary survey of this general trend by searching for key words such as “one-month living in Jeju” both in English and Korean on YouTube. Focusing on vlogs specifically, I identified the twelve most prominent accounts,<sup>12</sup> and then conducted content analyses of all episodes related to one-month living in Jeju during October and December 2023. Inspired by Luc Pauwels’s multimodal analysis framework,<sup>13</sup> I identified both salient and absent features/topics, conducted in-depth analysis of content (including visual, textual, aesthetic, and sonic signifiers), collated the producers’ points of view and constructed personas, and delved into the implied audience, viewer comments, and vloggers’ interactions with viewers.

## One-Month Living as Liminality: Escape, Resistance, and Transformation

South Korea’s rapid and successful economic growth was built on the developmental state’s population mobilization. Setting development and militarism as two pillars of the country’s organization, the Park Chung Hee developmental dictatorship (1961–79) mobilized a population who would willingly participate in the country’s industrialization. The economic structure was predicated on gender categories and hierarchy: the state established men as the primary family providers and military soldiers, and women as the primary biological and domestic reproducers (though they were also marginalized producers whose labor was exploited, but rarely acknowledged for its meaningful contribution to the national economy).<sup>14</sup> Both men and women were obligated to be dutiful and productive nationals. To produce hard-working laborers, the Korean education system disciplined children and teenagers to focus on academic achievement and immediate output. During the process of nurturing the population into productive parts of the collective national body, there was little room for individuals to express and realize their own ideas and tastes.

After overthrowing a military dictatorship in 1987, “cultural liberalization” created space for teenagers and youth to express themselves through appearance and cultural taste.<sup>15</sup> The 1990s marked the flourishing of liberal cultural activities, characterized by the proliferation of non-governmental organizations (to promote previously suppressed matters such as human,

environmental, and women's rights) and broadened access to film, literature, music, and fashion. As the country faced a financial crisis in the late 1990s and underwent neoliberalization, new regimes of oppression were enacted in Korean society, with their impacts being felt particularly among the young. The economic restructuring caused by the financial crisis not only allowed for the immediate layoff of millions of people, but also created a flexible regime of labor that replaced full-time, regular workers (*jeonggyujik*) with part-time, contracted, outsourced, and irregular workers, weakening the leverage of labor. As I have argued elsewhere, "unlike the developmental period, [today] the country's economy is not growing rapidly, thus younger generations cannot have similar levels of job security and employment opportunities enjoyed by previous generations."<sup>16</sup> The hypercompetitive job market created neoliberal subjects, individuals forged under immense pressure for self-development and entrepreneurship. In order to survive in the brutally competitive neoliberal economy, individuals are pressured to constantly cultivate themselves as valuable currency, and invest in accumulating human capital.<sup>17</sup>

Such pressure engendered the so-called "spec generation."<sup>18</sup> Spec is "a term that was coined around the mid-2000s and is used widely on college campuses. The term spec (an abbreviation of the word *specifications*—the detailed list of features describing the various components of a consumer product) pertains to résumé-building activities and to the salient desire to attain long-term, secure employment."<sup>19</sup> Thus, young South Koreans strive to be equipped with more abilities, including higher degrees, English fluency, overseas experiences, and other skills. The social reality, however, is that the economy cannot support all these individuals as employees, which has resulted in creating an overeducated, underemployed, overworked, and intensely dedicated youth population on the one hand, and growing class inequality on the other.

The symptoms of neoliberal afflictions and intensifying inequality are encapsulated in so-called *Hell Joseon* discourse. *Joseon* (also spelled *Chosun*) is one of Korea's premodern dynasties that existed from 1392 until 1919. *Hell Joseon* describes "a society of competitive education and employment, soaring education costs, low employment rates, unaffordable housing, clashing values between generations, air pollution, and political conflict."<sup>20</sup> The term was initially coined and circulated on anonymous internet bulletin boards, and was incorporated into mainstream media discourse around 2015.<sup>21</sup> *Hell Joseon* is now widely used to refer to a broader social phenomenon of deepening class inequality between the so-called "gold or silver spoons" and "clay or

dirt spoons,” as well as intensifying competition, lengthening working hours, and worsening quality of life in South Korea. *Hell Joseon* is most acutely felt by people in their 20s and 30s who identify themselves as “the ‘n-po’ Generation, with ‘n’ being a variable of exponential growth and ‘po’ from the Korean word for ‘give up (*pogi*).”<sup>22</sup> Economic insecurity and rising living costs force young South Koreans to give up on facets that were once deemed to be essential parts of life such as getting married, owning a house, or having a child. The following is a quote from someone who chose to quit work and migrate to Jeju vividly delivers her generation’s grievances:

Due to the high tuition fees, we become credit defaulters as soon as we graduate, and due to the tough job market, we become unemployed right after graduation. Consequently, we are unable to secure a job, income, a home, get married, or even have children. Therefore, we are the generation that lacks these six essential things, as well as hope. However, society often says, “It’s fine, it’s okay.” We struggle to understand what’s so fine and okay about it.<sup>23</sup>

Leveraging Korean citizens’ global mobility emerged as a temporary solution to *Hell Joseon* issues. Examples include temporary migration to Australia as “working holiday makers,”<sup>24</sup> language travel to North America,<sup>25</sup> long-term travel, and “one-month stays” in Southeast Asia or rural areas.<sup>26</sup> South Koreans leave to cure physical and mental burnout, for self-reward, self-discovery, and self-healing, and to search for a meaningful life. One-month living (*handalsalgi*) emerged as one recent trend for seeking “small but certain moments of happiness (*sohwakhaeng*)” for the n-po generation, which is consumed with work, but lacks sufficient disposable income to entirely quit a job or engage in long-term travel.

Jeju has emerged as the most visited place for one-month living for several reasons: having dualistic positions—as part of Korea, but also somewhere exotic enough to feel distanced from the social mainstream—Jeju offers a sense of liminality. The island is just one hour by flight from Seoul, but since one must cross the sea to reach Jeju, it feels distant enough from fast-paced and competitive urban life. It is semi-rural, but equipped with urban amenities such as aesthetically pleasing cafés and good restaurants. Practical aspects add even more merit to Jeju:

The biggest advantage of living in Jeju for a month is the proximity. It’s just an hour away from Seoul and an hour from other regions as well. Language

is not an issue in case something happens, and there are many nearby hospitals. You don't need a passport or a visa, and you can leave without much preparation whenever you want. What I like the most is the sense of security and safety in the country I live in, South Korea, and the ease of going back and forth anytime.<sup>27</sup>

While Jeju ensures security, convenience, and affordability, it still provides a geographical and temporal separation from oppressive urban environments. During the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, restrictions on international travel and the innovation of working from home drove more people to Jeju as temporary inhabitants and visitors.

Jeju functions as a place of liminal transition. One-month stayers choose Jeju for taking a break in between jobs or preparing to shift into another phase of life. Episode 1 of the Jeju vlogs by Umi (@umi5283) begins: "The resignation of a mid-30s office worker who had become exhausted as much as one could. I finally decided to take a break and think about the future while embarking on a one-month living on Jeju Island, which had only kept in my heart." Hye-won (@hyewon2310), who began uploading videos on YouTube during her one-year living in Jeju, explains: "I quit the company I had been working at for ten years and decided to go to Jeju Island for a year without any specific plans. I wanted to do something I've always wanted to do for at least a year in my life. While I was so tired of corporate life, I am now healing and enjoying myself in moderation in Jeju." Those with families share the same exhausted condition. Episode 1 of the Jeju videos of Ray's Home (@maisonderay723) states: "after 8 years of marriage and 6 years of parenting in the competitive city life, we have made a courageous decision. That is to spend a month on the beautiful island of Jeju. We wonder if this unique journey will bring our family closer, and whether we will return home with happy memories."

Viewers' reactions to these breaks from work are noteworthy. Comments to SEONI BEAM (@seonibeam) include "You've worked hard all this time. I hope you have a restful time." One video of Haniyam (@haniyam\_) received comments such as "Thanks to you, I've dreamt of Jeju once again" and "a one-month living on Jeju, something every working professional dreams of." One comment to Umi (@umi5283) was: "I'm jealous. Jeju after quitting your job. . . ." South Koreans are afflicted by long, exhausting working hours, harsh labor conditions, and social pressure. One-month stayers choose Jeju as a place for a break from such subjugation. South Korea implemented a 40-hour work week (i.e., five working days) only in 2004, and individual workplaces have only gradually adopted this system since then. The concept of a "break

from work” was scarcely conceivable during a period when the entire society was oriented toward economic growth. The contemporary adoption of work breaks serves as a dual manifestation, illustrating both symptoms of exhaustion and a fervent desire to break free from such oppressive conditions.

So, what do these visitors do in Jeju for a whole month? They visit cafés, famous restaurants, beaches, and well-known tourist hotspots; they climb *oreum*<sup>28</sup> and the Halla mountain, walk along *olle*<sup>29</sup> trails or inside various forests, stroll around their temporary neighborhoods, drive along coastal roads, and sometimes play golf. Those with kids often display more mundane routines such as cooking, dining with the children, hanging laundry in the yard, riding bikes, and going to grocery stores or traditional markets. Life in Jeju is primarily a life without occupational duties, complete relaxation. Even working professionals like freelance writers are not governed by the strict schedules of the city, but rather, by their own chosen pace and rhythm. In Jeju people experience a different sense of time, pivoting from the dense and regimented daily grind of city life to a lax and self-defined daily rhythm. Living in Jeju means erasing the temporal constraints ingrained by the city and retuning bodily rhythms to the island’s temporality.

In other words, life in Jeju involves breaking free from the city’s systematic governance. Consequently, what people often feel upon first arriving on the island is that “In Jeju, a day becomes longer.” Drawing on Foucault’s notion of the heterotopia, Myung-Jin Kim’s research interprets Jeju as a middle-zone between unrealistic utopia and realistic dystopia:

Jeju functions as a ‘counter-space’ where individuals raise objections to the hyper-competitive, winner-takes-all neoliberal economic system of the 2010s and the exhaustive capitalism in Korean society, pushing them to their limits. . . . By providing a contrast to the city’s compulsive rhythm, Jeju’s unique environment with its stunning natural landscapes allowed individuals to resist the existing system through practical means.<sup>30</sup>

For Kim, this resistance to oppressive urban governance does not aim to overthrow the structure. Rather, it critically questions the conventional restless lifestyle that always emphasizes productivity, material affluence, and economic growth. I would like to extend Kim’s notion of a counterspace of resistance toward a space of positive transition and transformation. One-month stayers not only resist neoliberal and urban oppression, but also pursue personal transition and transformation during their break.

The concepts of liminality and the liminoid are helpful to capture one-

month stayers' transitional pursuit. Liminality refers to a "transitory and precarious phase between stable states, which is marked off by conceptual, spatial and/or temporal barriers, within which individuals, groups and/or objects are set apart from society and/or the everyday."<sup>31</sup> Victor Turner claims that while liminal experiences traditionally include rituals and rites imposed by a social structure that aims to have transformative changes, in modern society liminality has been largely replaced by the liminoid.<sup>32</sup> The liminoid "was still a space of suspension of normal social rules and thus a site of playful creativity, but importantly, it had lost its connection with transition and had become something of a stable institution in itself."<sup>33</sup> One-month living involves the natures of both liminality and liminoid, in Turner's terms, in that it is a site of playful creativity, but also of a transformative transition through leisure as well.

Individuals seek to utilize their brief stays in Jeju to reflect on life aspirations, discover meaningful values, and explore sources of energy and direction for their next chapters. Moving Water (@mving) narrates: "living on Jeju Island for a month has been on our family's bucket list. Although taking a leave of absence from work for a month had its economic losses, the memories our family created during that month are deeply etched in my heart." The invaluable meaning of life can be discovered in the liminal state of a one-month stay (within the liminal space of Jeju), which departs from the structure of pursuing economic accumulation since it usually entails some form of economic loss. Episode 6 of Umi's (@umi5283) Jeju vlogs displays texts that read: "While living for a month, I endlessly gazed at the sea, and it never gets tiresome. I wonder why looking at the sea alone brings such healing. Only after quitting my job and resting in Jeju was I able to contemplate the next chapter of my life." This account also confirms the potential of the liminal for a positive transition. For the Jeju *handalsalgi* vlogs, the liminal continue to serve as a space of creative imagination, of provocative linkages, of personal empowerment.<sup>34</sup>

## Visitation Broadcast: Subjectivity Performance and Performativity

While taking rest and relaxation, some one-month stayers continue to spend time and energy filming their daily lives, editing the videos, and broadcasting them online for sharing. Why do they choose to show their visitations

publicly? Scholars have examined social media as a kind of stage on which individual performances take place.<sup>35</sup> Vlogs may appear to be one-way communication—a mediatized personal diary—but once posted online they are exposed to an audience of strangers. Erving Goffman suggests that individuals are performing as long as an author has an audience in mind.<sup>36</sup> One-month living vlogs have a presumed audience, to whom vloggers perform their subjectivity/lifestyle.

Recent scholarship extends Goffman's notion of performance by drawing on Judith Butler's concept of performativity, based on the idea that identity and subjectivity is an ongoing process of becoming, a sequence of acts that retroactively constitute identity.<sup>37</sup> Seen thus, vloggers do not simply present a static, fixed identity, nor do their self-presentations "emerge from a subject that is knowledgeable, conscious and aware of the audience."<sup>38</sup> Instead, subject-formation "recognizes the limitations of the self and self-knowledge, while emphasizing the importance of the inter-subjective bonds that link people together."<sup>39</sup> Identity performances, while appearing intentional and reflexive, actively contribute to the narrative construction of selfhood, retroactively defining the subject who articulates these expressions.<sup>40</sup> Sociologist Sherry Turkle's view aligns with this interpretation, considering the vlog as both a constructive and projective medium. We should attend to how individual subjectivities are negotiated and reconstructed during the actual experience of one-month living as well as through its representation. This point compels us to think about the "wider structure of power that regulate[s] and impose[s] censors on self-presentations."<sup>41</sup>

In understanding the performativity of one-month living vloggers, the "wider structure of power" can largely be dissected into two parts: aspirations of liberation from neoliberal urban governance, and the ruling grammar of the vlog genre. First, the social desire to be freed from neoliberal oppression. Rob Cover argues that social media is popular "because they are the most effective means to achieve this cultural demand and respond to contemporary anxieties around subject intelligibility and recognizability."<sup>42</sup> South Korean anxieties over neoliberalism, its demanding way of life, and individuals' aspirations to overcome (if not overthrow) such oppression are embedded in the performativity of one-month living vloggers. To people living in *Hell Joseon*, the mobility, economic resources, and time flexibility to live beyond brutal and disciplined urban governance becomes a resource for subjectivity formation and performance. Broadcasters of one-month living in Jeju have a presumed audience: immobile YouTube viewers who desire to flee from metropolitan life,

but do not have economic resources and working environment flexibility. For vlog viewers, watching Jeju videos gives vicarious satisfaction and healing. Some audience reactions demonstrate the point: “I felt healed throughout the video,” “Get healed and come back,” “Just watching makes me happy” to @maisonderay723; “Just by watching, it’s a heartwarming video. Well done” to @mvng. The demand and desires of the audience sets the discourses and norms that constitutes the actors’ performances.

Second, YouTube’s platform protocols and the general grammar of the travel/*handalsalgi* vlog genre. Users of each social media platform develop “platform vernaculars,” defined as the distinct combination of “styles, grammars, and logics that constitute a social media platform’s genre of communication.”<sup>43</sup> Platforms cause their users to develop a unique grammar of visual aesthetics, which becomes a constitutive element of subject formation and performance. There are a few distinctive modes of representation, content, and filming and editing styles used across travel/*handalsalgi* vlogs. They are organized around visually aesthetic scenes, romantic ambiance, and a healing mood.

Jeju vlog creators harness the beauty of Jeju’s nature to express a slow, simple, and beautiful lifestyle. The sea and beach are the most frequently featured elements. Vloggers emphasize how the charm of the sea in Jeju varies depending on the viewing location, time, and season. Videos capture the sea’s emerald color, the lonely winter sea with crashing waves, and the breathtaking seaside sunset. For example, @reeanne used a drone to show the waters from a variety of perspectives, including aerial. The *gotjawal* forest is another space that evokes calmness and relaxation. A combination of *got* (forest) and *jawal* (rubble or rocky soil in Jeju Indigenous language), *gotjawal* refers to a primeval forest uniquely formed on the lava terrain in Jeju. One-month stayers frequently present the mystique of *gotjawal* forest paths, which can be experienced only in Jeju. More than 300 diverse and exquisite *oreums* in Jeju are also heavily employed elements. The breathtaking natural beauty of Jeju Island, spreading in a 360-degree view from the *oreum* summit, provides a sense of openness and liberation. Jeju’s beautiful landscapes are adjusted through editing in terms of screen ratios, color temperature, brightness, and saturation.

Vloggers frequently incorporate pastoral hallmarks in their videos as well. These include Jeju’s basalt stone walls, small alleyways in villages enclosed by these stone walls, beaches with turning windmills, fields in full flowering blooms, and sunsets seen while driving. When they visit cafés, the cam-



Figure 8.1. Café interior with a beach view—inspired by scenes commonly featured in various Jeju vlogs. Photo by the author.

era usually follows throughout the interior and exterior of the place, more interested in capturing the aesthetic “vibe” than the food.<sup>44</sup> Those cafés with views of the sea, fields, or mountain are particularly appreciated by viewers. Close-up views of animals, such as dogs and cats seen on the road, are frequently employed as ornamental components, arousing viewers’ emotions. The final touch is the placement of background music, completing the “romantic showcase” of Jeju.

In sum, the dominant grammar of the *handalsalgi* vlog genre is organized around a relaxed and restful way of life presented via beautiful nature, aesthetic landscapes, and mundane but ornamental elements. By watching others, vloggers learn the conventions of the genre, and then participate in the formation of this genre by strictly controlling their content and mode of presentation. Vloggers manage their representation by complying with community norms and confining their content to relaxation, rest, healing, and leisure. The audience’s role is also important here, as it consolidates the genre’s grammar and reiterates reflexive associations with Jeju: “It feels like I’m in Jeju. The video is so soothing” to @pocoa214; “Jeju Island has a great sense of aesthetics” to @umi5283. One-month living vloggers construct and present their own subjectivities and feelings around the island itself, in relationship to the platform and the vlog genre.

South Koreans are under immense pressure to constantly cultivate their human capital and prove their value in the neoliberal work environment. By separating themselves from neoliberalism's hyper-intensity, one-month stayers seek a "new self" that is removed from their worker and urbanite mainland identity. This escape, however, does not really transcend neoliberal competition; rather, one-month stayers participate in neoliberalism in different ways, with new self-brands formed in Jeju. Refashioning the self, which is in the constant process of formation, is achieved by performing relaxation, rest, and healing in Jeju for the vlog audience. By broadcasting their visitation to Jeju in the form of aesthetic and romantic lifestyle performance, one-month stayers try to build cultural capital that might empower them back in the neoliberal marketplace. This seemingly "productive escape" makes ideologically resistant individuals ironically conform to a broader structure of power once again.

## Contested Visitation and Representation

While the one-month living vloggers interact with their viewers, another audience—local Jeju people—are completely excluded from the vlogs. One-month stayers in Jeju typically choose to maintain a separation from the islanders. Thus, the concept of "living like a local" does not apply at all to one-month living in Jeju. They simply consume Jeju's nature, aesthetic elements, leisure, and culinary assets, and the vlog of their visitation centers around those aspects only. Jeju's landscape, environment, and social reality is simply reduced to the background for a story about the transformation of mainlanders. The local community remains as mere background or is entirely erased.

Vlog representations of one-month living in Jeju rarely reveal the daily or historical realities that local residents endure. Jeju's collective trauma from the April Massacre (1948–54) and its subsequent political subjugation is never represented. How many Jeju farmers, fishers, and pastures were dispossessed of their ancestral lands in order to construct theme parks, hotels, golf courses, and leisure facilities that tourists consume and enjoy? Jeju islanders suffer the harmful effects of overtourism, such as rising property prices, trash, traffic congestion, crime, and the sense of alienation produced by the tourist gaze. Recent migrants to Jeju experience additional issues like friction with lifelong residents, economic hardships, difficulties adapting to the unfamiliar culture, and a lack of educational and cultural infrastructure. By excluding local peo-

ple and lived realities from their representations, one-month living vlogs turn Jeju into a “non-place” stripped of its embedded meanings. As Myung-jin Kim has argued: “Choosing to live on Jeju is not a location-specific decision for residing in Jeju but rather a non-place practice aimed at living without being tied to any specific location.”<sup>45</sup>

In their representation and performance, the one-month living vloggers represent Jeju to their audiences as a space of relaxation, happiness, healing, and cure. This enables visitors to (re)discover Jeju’s landscape and nature, reflect upon their own lifestyles, status, and empowerment, while overlooking local people. Their break from the busy and complex daily life on the urban mainland aestheticizes Jeju people as an invisible Other. The place where Jeju people actually live becomes a mediatized non-place, circulated as a therapeutic landscape.

Elsewhere, I argue that the portrayal of Jeju’s Woljeong beach on Instagram creates, circulates, and consolidates tourism imaginaries of Jeju as a “pretty place.”<sup>46</sup> Such visual tropes both reveal and conceal an ongoing colonizing structure which is latent in tourism and discursively projected via performances on Instagram. The state promoted rampant tourism development projects in the post-Korean War era, which have colonized Jeju by dispossessing its people of land and resources, extracting profits from the island, and excluding the islanders from decision-making and benefit sharing. Both tourism imaginaries and tourism development reproduce and perpetuate Jeju’s status as an “internal colony,” distanced from capitalist modernity. The vlog performances by one-month stayers reinscribe the tourism imaginaries of Jeju as a site of rest, cure, and healing, consolidating the island’s colonial situation once again, since the subject of healing and therapy are ultimately not the island’s own inhabitants, but outsiders.

## Notes

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2. Jonas Larsen, “De-exoticizing Tourist Travel: Everyday Life and Sociality on the Move,” *Leisure Studies* 27, no. 1 (2008): 26.

3. Henning Füller and Boris Michel, “‘Stop Being a Tourist!’ New Dynamics of Urban Tourism in Berlin-Kreuzberg,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38, no. 4 (2014): 1304.

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6. Joe Quick, "The presentation of collective self in touristic life: Dancing and painting for touristic consumption in highland Ecuador," in *Front and Back Stage of Tourism Performance: Imaginaries and Bucket List Venues*, ed. Frances Riemer (London: Routledge, 2020), 50.

7. Victor Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology," *Rice University Studies* 60, no. 3 (1974): 59.

8. Youjeong Oh, "Seeing the Development of Jeju Global Education City from the Margins," in *On the Margins of Urban South Korea: Core Location as Method and Praxis*, ed. Jesook Song and Laam Hae (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 55–56.; Youjeong Oh, "Insta-Gaze: Aesthetic Representation and Contested Transformation of Woljeong, South Korea," *Tourism Geographies: An International Journal of Tourism Space, Place and Environment* 24, no. 6–7 (2022): 1047–1048.; Youjeong Oh, "Against the Colonization of Urban Development: The Top-dong Right to the City Movement in Jeju, South Korea," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 47, no. 3 (2023): 429–432.

9. Dong-hyun Kim, *Jeju, uri anui sikminji [Jeju, Our Internal Colony]* (Seoul: Geulnuri, 2016).

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12. Selected accounts are @seonibeam, @umi5283, @inyoung, @pocoa214, and @hye-won2310, @maisonderay723, @nijilog, @reeanne, @haniyam\_, @mving, and @siyeonhan.

13. Luc Pauwels, "A Multimodal Framework for Analyzing Websites as Cultural Expressions," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 17, no. 3 (2012): 250.

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16. Oh, "Insta-Gaze," 1051.

17. Eleana Kim, "Human Capital: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Neoliberal Logic of Return," *The Journal of Korean Studies* 17, no. 2 (2012): 305–306.

18. Cho, "The Spec Generation," 445–446.

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20. Kyungja Jung and Yong Moon Jung, "Neoliberal Migration Regime, Escape from 'Hell Joseon' and the Pursuit of Cosmopolitan Aspiration: An Overview of Temporary Migration from South Korea to Australia," *International Review of Korean Studies* 16, no. 1 (2019): 42.

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393110/1. See also “Young South Koreans call their country ‘hell’ and look for ways out” by Anna Fifield. January 31, 2016, *The Washington Post*.

22. Eun-ju Chyung, “‘Sohwakhaeng’ Taps into Koreans’ Desire to Find Happiness in Little Things,” *Korea Herald*, July 29, 2018.

23. Mi-jeong Suh, *Dangsin-do jeju*. [You, Jeju] (Seoul: Rubicon, 2014), 156–157.

24. Working holiday makers are individuals who hold working holiday visas, enabling them to travel to and work in a foreign country for a specified duration without undergoing a complex visa application process. Jung and Jung, “Neoliberal Migration Regime,” 42.

25. Jennifer Jihye Chun and Ju Hui Judy Han, “Language Travels and Global Aspirations of Korean Youth,” *positions: asia critique* 23, no. 3 (2015): 565.

26. Jaeyeon Choe, “South Korean ‘One-Month Stay’ Travellers,” in *Handbook of Niche Tourism*, ed Claudia Dolezal, Claudio Milano, Adam Jones, Joseph M. Cheer, and Marina Novelli (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022), 390.

27. Source: Blair’s Brunch Story, accessed on November 6, 2023, <https://brunch.co.kr/@169bee7fa0dc42e/404>

28. The term “*oreum*” refers to a parasitic volcano on Jeju. *Oreum* also means climb or climbing in Jeju dialect.

29. *Olle* originally means “the small alley leading to house from the street” in Jeju dialect. Now Jeju Olle Trail refers to a 437km walk trail along the coastline of the island.

30. Myung-jin Kim, “*Jeju iju seosae natanan heterotopiajeok sangsang*” [Heterotopia Jeju: Narrative of migrants in publishing media], *Humanist Contents* 48 (2018): 155.

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32. Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid,” 65.

33. Skjoldager-Nielsen and Edelman, “Liminality,” 2.

34. Susanne Klien, “‘Living the Life of My Choice’: Lifestyle Migrants in Rural Japan Balancing between Local Commitment and Transnational Cosmopolitanism,” *Asian Ethnology* 81, no. 1/2 (2022): 118.

35. Maggie Griffith and Zizi Papacharissi, “Looking for you: An analysis of video blogs,” *First Monday* 15, no. 1 (2010): 1; Oh, “Insta-Gaze,” 1044.

36. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 8–9.

37. Rob Cover, “Becoming and Belonging: Performativity, Subjectivity, and the Cultural Purposes of Social Networking,” in *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online*, ed. Anna Poletti and Julie Rak (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 56.

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41. O’Leary and Murphy, “Moving Beyond Goffman,” 86.

42. Cover, “Becoming and Belonging,” 57.

43. Martin Gibbs, James Meese, Michael Arnold, Bjorn Nansen, and Marcus Carter, “#Funeral and Instagram: death, social media, and platform vernacular,” *Information, Communication & Society* 18, no. 3 (2014): 257.

44. While the younger group present mostly trendy and aesthetic restaurants and cafes, the older group with kids deliver information on “local” restaurants as well. @reeanne says in one episode, “we came to the neighborhood restaurant recommended by the landlady.” Other account holders also note similar points, saying “I heard that this restaurant is popular among the locals here.”

45. Myung-jin Kim, “Heterotopia Jeju,” 155–156.

46. Oh, “Insta-Gaze,” 1055.

## CHAPTER 9

# Sightseeing Tours and Gendered Performances in Georgian London's Paradisial Gardens

Humberto Garcia

Henceforward we will devote our lives to London, and its heart-alluring  
Damsels:  
Our hearts are satiated with viewing fields, gardens, rivers, and palaces.  
We have no longing for the Toba, Sudreh, or other trees of Paradise:  
We are content to rest under the shade of these terrestrial Cypresses.<sup>1</sup>

Early nineteenth-century London was congested with carriages and pedestrians on cobbled roads, crammed with tenements and shops in every street, lurking with pickpockets and prostitutes, and polluted with smoke from coal factories and open sewers. Yet, surprisingly, the city appeared as a pristine rural retreat to the Lucknow-born Muslim administrator, scholar, and poet Mirza Abu Talib Khan Isfahani (1752–1806). The epigraph comes from his “Ode to London,” a Sufi ghazal (sacred love lyrics) in the style of Hafiz, the famous fourteenth-century Shirazi poet. Composed after reaching London in January 1800, the poem appears in his *Masir-i Talibi*, completed in 1803 and translated from Persian to English in 1810. This travelogue is a *rihla* or pilgrimage narrative. It describes Abu Talib's time in Ireland and England before leaving on June 7, 1802 to worship at the shrines of Shi'i Imams in Kazmain, Najaf, and Karbala via Paris, Genoa, Malta, and Constantinople during his return trip to Calcutta. He also wrote *Diwan-i Talib*, a *masnavi* (rhyming couplet), which has never been entirely translated into English. In it are several verses glorifying well-trodden London attractions such as St. Paul's Cathedral and The Tower. But his “*Poetical Tour*,” as he calls it, primarily extols beautiful Englishwomen at the city's theaters, continuous with the “fields, gardens, rivers, and palaces” that he had seen at Vauxhall Gardens

in Lambeth, Ranelagh Gardens in Chelsea, and other gardens in the vicinity.<sup>2</sup> These sites serve as case studies for how visitation allowed Londoners to tour exotic destinations virtually in a paradisaical landscape overflowing with “heart-alluring Damsels.”

Up to sixty-three public gardens of different sizes were operating in and near London by 1800, with Vauxhall and Ranelagh as the most spectacular.<sup>3</sup> These countrylike getaways were fixtures of the city’s tourist circuit, which commodified pleasure in public forums for upper- and middle-class fashion enthusiasts eager to show off their economic and cultural capital. Eighteenth-century tour books and private diaries placed greater value on seeing fashionable gardens, theaters, spas, concert venues, and exhibition halls than the aristocratic homes and civic buildings that had attracted tourists a century prior.<sup>4</sup> As “Romantic tourism” in rural parts of northern England, Wales, and Scotland was becoming a thriving industry promoted in painting guides and novels (and as the Grand Tour in Europe that aristocrats traditionally undertook for edification and entertainment was almost impossible during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars) city dwellers took great pleasure in behaving like foreign tourists in their own country.<sup>5</sup>

Gardens fulfilled this desire. To visit one was to immerse oneself in visceral and participatory performances wherein visitors could playfully alter their personas by recreating the world-as-stage with other flâneurs-cum-actors. These theatricalized settings for socializing structured subjectivities in arcadian recreations. What visitors saw in these gardens—and how they reflexively saw themselves seeing among others while strolling through built storytelling environments—was kinesthetically generative, a collective experience of worldmaking. Georgian London’s terrestrial paradises were prototypes of what Josephine Machon describes as “immersive theaters,” multisensory simulacra in three dimensions that totally subsumed visitors’ consciousness, choreographing adventurous journeys beyond ordinary social life.<sup>6</sup> At immersive garden-theaters like Vauxhall and Ranelagh visitors performed virtual travel to a fantastical elsewhere without incurring a hazardous, time-consuming, and expensive sojourn by sea.

These immersive excursions impacted more than visitors’ imaginative horizons. As mixed-gender places for both seeing and being seen, they also revised which behaviors were socially appropriate for men and women. This essay furthers the present volume’s interest in tracing tropes of visitation by approaching performances vital to the formation of masculine and feminine identities. I argue that the experience invoked in Abu Talib’s “Ode to London”

reveals how pleasure gardens, as globally-facing performance venues, recalibrated prevailing ideas of gender and sexuality in Georgian England. Indeed, Abu Talib shared visitors' belief that the garden is a "*terrestrial paradise*," a site for experiencing transgressive pleasures "outside the everyday codes of behavior and decorum."<sup>7</sup> In his Hafiz-style "ode," Abu Talib virtually projected himself into these gardenlike kinesthetic cities, and gendered them feminine.<sup>8</sup> Such depictions of these artificial landscapes and the choreographed assemblages of gendered bodies that populated them are crucial for understanding how London's private aristocratic estates were transformed into public touristic destinations.

What Abu Talib considered paradises of love etymologically resonates with the old Avestan term, *pairidaēza* (walled enclosure), from which the English word "paradise" was derived via Persian, Greek, and Latin. It referred to enclosed parks and orchards in pre-Islamic Persia's royal courtyards, eventually becoming a metaphor for the biblical Garden of Eden and the sensuous afterlife promised to devout Muslims in the Qur'an.<sup>9</sup> "Paradise" was a buzzword during the European Renaissance, when Islamic horticultural and architectural designs from the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Empires were incorporated into gardens as far west as early Stuart England.<sup>10</sup> Integral to urban layouts since the Achaemenids (550–330 BC), these historical places for entertainment, imperial ceremonies, military encampments, banquet parties, and pilgrimage framed how Abu Talib saw the cypresses shading the walkways of Vauxhall and Ranelagh. Common in Iranian cities, ornamental cypress trees were used in classical Persian poetry and miniature painting to idealize women's elegant slim physique.<sup>11</sup> The trees' placement by streams in Persianate gardens symbolized, on the one hand, the sovereign's authority within a well-ordered city and its residents' freedom to move within it—the "garden of victory" that represents a country's opulence, power, and prestige.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the paradisaical cypress was an overwrought symbol of worldly transience and otherworldly transcendence.<sup>13</sup> This double figuration sets into motion Abu Talib's transformation from a stern Muslim ascetic to a whimsical cosmopolitan aesthete, ironically reimagined as a spiritual rite of passage in his subsequent pilgrimage to the Middle East. The arboreal typography subtends circuitous changes in his masculine self-presentation: he leaves Bengal as an abstinent Muslim who wrote against the unmanliness of aesthetic overstimulation only to arrive in Britain as a carefree tourist who writes with gusto about seductive female bodies, and then reverts to the first persona in his religious repentance for past hedonistic excesses.

Material practices in England structured urban spaces intersubjectively according to what historians John Urry and Jonas Larsen call the “tourist gaze.” They have traced its kinaesthesia to the invention of photography in the 1830s, a mobile virtual technology that transports the countryside, antiquity, and exoticism into modern metropolises.<sup>14</sup> I instead argue that this optical effect can be seen much earlier, in the multimedia phenomena that brought huge crowds to Vauxhall and Ranelagh for half a century beginning in 1728. The first two sections of this chapter examine how London’s so-called Turkish or Mahometan paradises staged non-normative modes of spectatorship that exoticized locational identities, with the effect of making women vulnerable to male voyeurism—how gentlemen *looked* in visual proximity to the opposite sex could result in emasculation. In the final section, I focus on how transforming gender codes in English society were transmitted to the South Asian context via the *Diwan-i-Talib*. Analyzing how Abu Talib approached female visitors’ gender-nonconforming performances as alluring fairies in pleasure gardens, I demonstrate the cross-cultural valence of Persianate norms of Indo-Islamic masculinity.

## Virtual Theaters of the World

Today, virtual reality has become synonymous with digital media, such as avatar-based imaging in video games, military and medical training simulations, and online technologies used in the education and business sectors. While these mediums have enhanced the feeling of total immersion necessary for virtual transportation, the aesthetic principles for creating that effect are much older. Immersing viewers in an imaginary three-dimensional space requires their mental concentration and temporary disbelief through what Brian Massumi calls a “serial unfolding” of transposed geometric images, or facades, that dislocates the perceptual matrix in relation to the real.<sup>15</sup> This very intent was behind Vauxhall’s innovations. Opened in 1661, the garden was redesigned in such a manner under Jonathan Tyers’s management in the 1730s, followed by its competitor Ranelagh (opened in 1742). Vauxhall mixed French and Italian garden designs with Rococo, Gothic, Chinoiserie, and Turquerie architectural elements. Visitors willing to pay the entrance fee walked into a hospitable cosmopolis in pursuit of foreign sightseeing and forbidden desires. Before them lay a *theatrum mundi*, a tangible microcosm of the world where distinctions between performer and audience faded, almost

magically.<sup>16</sup> Seeing while being seen, or “people tourism,” was the prime attraction in immersive garden-theaters where men and women mingled to discover cultural norms different from their own.<sup>17</sup>

When Tyers acquired the lease for Vauxhall in 1728—then known as New Spring Gardens—the rural twelve acres on the southern bank of the Thames was landscaped as a dramatic alternative to the City of London on the other side. He hired artists, some of whom had painted stage scenery in the city, to create a theatrical extravaganza.<sup>18</sup> Partly inspired by the Drury Lane and Covent Garden Theaters, the property was organized around the principles of montage and sequence—the same principles that Sergei M. Eisenstein famously argued formed the basis for modern cinematography. Imbuing space with affective storytelling qualities relied on participants’ creative agency through the act of serial looking and walking. Step by step, scene by scene, the storied landscape moves virtually like “ancient films.”<sup>19</sup>

Tyers perfected this technique. Garden visitors inserted themselves into the fictions of tourism concretized by physical images in apparent movement. They walked down meandering pathways shaded by trees, past expansive lawns, triumphal arches, sculptures, pavilions outfitted like stage sets, grand illuminations, and a rotunda or music room, finally reaching the supper boxes where food could be ordered onsite. Each box had a painting of rural pastimes mirroring visitors’ group activities—strolling, singing, eating, dancing, and romancing.<sup>20</sup> These seating areas resembled the *exedra* or niched conversation seats used in the curved pavilions of Renaissance-style Italian gardens, which were themselves modeled after ancient Rome’s amphitheaters. At the end of the walks were *trompe-loeil* illusions: a painting of Palmyra’s ruins in the South Walk; two arches of a Roman aqueduct in the Cross Walk; a painted Gothic obelisk propped up with boards within a planted grove; and a mechanical cascade on the east side of the Cross Walk, a filmic montage (with accompanying sound effects) of a miller’s house, watermill, and waterfall that released strips of tin glittering under lit lamps to simulate flowing water. Transparencies hung over makeshift stages in allusion to pastoral scenes or classical myths. The overall sensation was like traveling back in time, or to contemporary Italy as if on a Grand Tour.<sup>21</sup>

Guidebooks prepared visitors for the journey by teaching them how and where to look. From the entrance onward, visual attention was directed toward Vauxhall’s “noble gravel walk” and “stately elms,” forming “a fine vista.”<sup>22</sup> Spectators were presumed to be refined art connoisseurs.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Tyers went to great lengths to make the garden respectable by not admitting

servants, rabblers, and prostitutes, although some of them snuck inside anyway. Eighteenth-century tour guides prescribed social etiquette in the garden's moving theaters. Likewise, before entering the premises, visitors had to agree to behave like classy public citizens or face ejection. Class and gender expectations were enforced through what Peter de Bolla calls a "metaphoric of the eye" that socioeconomically encoded the act of spectating within the garden's proto-cinematic spacing.<sup>24</sup> Visitation demanded bodily discipline in a risky intersubjective atmosphere; Tyers had created the infrastructure for a thrilling self-exploratory tour that required his customers' ethical consent. Being seen seeing produced a "virtual observer" dislocated from the *theatrum mundi* that he or she traversed with other strangers and artworks in motion.<sup>25</sup> Yet, as I shall show next, these virtual observers could, and often did, go off-script.

## A Mahometan Paradise on Earth

The act of seeing oneself seeing at Vauxhall, and doing so among others doing the same, conveyed a palpable otherness associated with the Orient. Vauxhall's nighttime illuminations, for example, "remind[ed] the reader of the magic representations in the Arabian Nights Entertainments."<sup>26</sup> Aesthetic and gastronomic pleasures marked as culturally different *oriented* (pun intended) the tourist gaze. The first picture visitors saw when entering Vauxhall was one hanging in the first pavilion's supper box, entitled "Two Mahometans gazing in wonder and astonishment at the many beauties of the place."<sup>27</sup> We can infer from the painting's location near the entrance that the ideal gazer was a Muslim tourist. This was complemented by another painting found on the right side of the temple adjoining the central pavilion, depicting "the entrance into Vauxhall, with a gentleman and a lady coming to it."<sup>28</sup> The "two Mahometans" gaze at the couple walking up to see the painting of these two staring back. This visual matrix circuitously splits the viewer into self and other, English and Oriental, so that the crowds appear representable to themselves.

The garden's art indirectly sanctioned voyeurism. For instance, the former painting's caption—the "many beauties of the place"—could refer to the artworks or to the female visitors themselves. Spectators were cued to look *at* and *like* the "gentleman and a lady" shown in the latter painting. With its shady paths and alleys, Vauxhall gave young, unwed couples and men seeking prostitutes cover to indulge in erotic fantasies inspired by their image of a

“*Mahometan* paradise” in London.<sup>29</sup> This recurrent descriptor for the garden implies an otherworldly realm where British gender and sexual norms could be kept in abeyance.

Consider a 1751 engraving of the garden’s South Walk (fig. 9.1), which functioned as a compendium to the first supper box painting.<sup>30</sup> The two turbaned figures in the foreground step off the canvas to inspect their social surroundings. A man shows them the “beauties” while ignoring the statue of Handel (far right), a symbol of Britishness, as if the Anglo-German composer (who regularly performed to large audiences at the garden) was irrelevant. The raised hand points either to the triumphal arch in the background or to the two women walking toward the men. The perspectival plane is further destabilized by the group of women on the left, distracting the first Oriental figure. Behind them stands a gentleman with a cane staring at the two gazers. The disorienting web of gazes around the ambiguous finger-pointing suggests that aesthetic contemplation was an excuse for erotically eyeing female bodies. The impression is that the virtual observer traverses the line between the real and the illusory, converting British gender norms into their opposite: Eastern decadence. The genteel public identity Tyers publicized to dispel the garden’s reputation for lax morality was ironically countered by visual direction that encouraged male tourists to behave like uncouth womanizers.

The idea that Vauxhall resembled a Mahometan/Turkish paradise was promoted by Tyers for the garden’s formal landlord Frederick, Prince of Wales (1707–1751), King George II’s oldest son. The prince had a say in Tyers’s addition of a “Turkish Tent” pavilion in 1742 west of the central grove and facing the orchestra, bearing a resemblance to Ottoman kiosks.<sup>31</sup> Underneath the “Turkish Tent” guests could feast like Ottoman grandees or display their opulence like indulgent sultans. Many of them embodied fairies, a frivolity illustrated in a painting hung in one of the supper boxes encircling the grove near the pavilion: painted by Francis Hayman and William Hogarth, *Fairies Dancing on the Green by Moonlight* (now lost) depicted an intruder raising a lamp to behold male and female fairy dancers holding hands outdoors in reverie.<sup>32</sup> Those who saw this painting in its original spot were immersed in an otherworldly sensibility; this was aided by “fairy music” played by musicians from hidden pits behind bushes, as if the sound were coming magically from the surrounding woodlands.<sup>33</sup> Spectators became participatory synesthetic agents overpowered by place-making contrivances that appeared real, a precursor to twentieth-century theme park technologies (like those examined by Joanna Dee Das elsewhere in this volume). The garden’s Orien-



Figure 9.1. Johann Sebastian Müller after Samuel Wale, *The Triumphal Arches, Mr. Handel's Statue &c. in the South Walk of Vauxhall Gardens*, after 1751. Engraving. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

tal simulacra entailed what Scott Magelssen has called “effigial simming,” in which a Gothic obelisk or Ottoman kiosk stands in for performances from other times and places.<sup>34</sup>

Likewise, Ranelagh Gardens featured illuminated gravel walks, an octagonal lawn, water basin, a canal with access to an island, and a temple variously referred to as “Chinese” or “Venetian.”<sup>35</sup> Its focal point was a rotunda even grander than Vauxhall’s. Considered an “amphitheater” and modeled after the Pantheon in Rome, its 555-foot circumference was spacious enough to hold 47 supper boxes on two levels along the wall, which sat up to eight people each and were individually decorated with a “droll painting in the mimic masquerade or pantomime taste.”<sup>36</sup> At the center an orchestral bandstand towered up to the olive-colored vaulted ceiling, with oval panels representing classical mythological figures. From the ceiling hung crystal chandeliers with lit candles (fig. 9.2). Guidebooks insisted that such “beauty,



Figure 9.2. Nathaniel Parr after Canaletto, *An Inside View of the Rotundo in Ranelagh Gardens*, 1751. Engraving. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

elegance, and grandeur” is “not to be equaled in Europe.”<sup>37</sup> For the high admission price (half a crown, more than double Vauxhall’s) guests could virtually tour Rome while enjoying a public breakfast of tea, coffee, bread, and butter, followed by a midday or evening music concert. This “fairy palace” was a “rival Paradise.”<sup>38</sup> Its “decorations of paint and gilding [are] gay as the Asiatic,” wrote a French tourist.<sup>39</sup>

A “fashionable place of resort,” Ranelagh was a magnet for nobility and royalty.<sup>40</sup> Inside its rotunda visitors danced at masquerades to late night dressed as Turks, Persians, Italians, and other foreigners among “polite company” (their servants stayed in a separate quarter to prevent their admittance).<sup>41</sup> “One of the pleasures of the place” was “walking round the Rotundo” in a circular pattern, which was meant to facilitate conversation; thick carpeting on the floor was deliberately added to enhance the musical acoustics and deafen the noise from the foot traffic.<sup>42</sup> An eighteenth-century poet dubbed this peculiar ritual “the mystic round” with “all ranks revolving in their sev-

eral spheres, / Kings, Nobles, Commoners, and Irish Peers.”<sup>43</sup> Different classes came together in a harmonious topsy-turvy setting, only to see themselves separately in accordance with the social pecking order. The promenading crowds came dressed in the newest fashions, ready to determine which individuals or groups ranked below them.<sup>44</sup> And, like Vauxhall, the visual-erotic catharsis involved in performing “the mystic round” turned principally on the “great numbers of both sexes [who] take a particular delight in it.”<sup>45</sup>

Seeing fashionable women up close in Georgian England’s paradisaical gardens gave men reason to visit, albeit at some social peril. Vauxhall’s wonders included “a display of living beauty and fashion in the persons of English ladies.” Most noteworthy at Ranelagh was “the splendid appearance of British ladies . . . in most gay and elegant dresses,” which outdid the illuminations.<sup>46</sup> Idyllic eroticism in architecture and music could cast doubt on a female visitor’s chastity and render effeminate their male pursuers insofar as the “young and giddy concubines” carousing these Islamic paradises on earth were blamed for a decline in “manhood amongst the present breeds of nobles.”<sup>47</sup> Self-promotional voyeurism in crowded rotundas and pavilions unleashed libidinal urges in ways that rendered the tourist gaze perilously seductive. Spectating the wrong way and in the wrong place could ruin social reputations.<sup>48</sup> Eroticized spaces such as Vauxhall’s notorious Lover’s Walk or Dark Walk—on the garden’s dimly lit edges—could turn decent ladies into strumpets and refined gentlemen into macaronis, a pejorative term for an effeminate man who poses as a genteel continental tourist.<sup>49</sup>

The latter identity was especially visible among lower-class men who flamboyantly toured London’s rustic fairylands in Italian or French costumes, as if they were aristocrats performing a Grand Tour. In the 1770s, these men were notorious for tripping waiters, breaking lamps, causing riots, fighting in duels, and staring at women.<sup>50</sup> Their inappropriate looking and impertinent language appeared effeminate, not because their masculinity was illegible to spectators, but rather, because it was too readable as a performance.<sup>51</sup> These sham tourists broke the implicit contract for participation; they exposed as a greater sham the polite hegemonic masculinities that followed similar dramatic protocols. Macaronis were disruptive imitations of imitations, who unmasked other actor-tourists’ social pretentiousness.

Corporeal awareness of how voyeuristic identities were gendered in garden-theaters is evident in Thomas Rowlandson’s painting, *Vauxhall Gardens* (fig. 9.3). The lady performing in the orchestra with a music band is the famous singer Mrs. Frederika Weichsel, who performed regularly at Vauxhall



Figure 9.3. Thomas Rowlandson, *Vauxhall Gardens*, ca. 1784. Watercolor. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

from 1765 to 1775. However, her audience are the true performers on what appears like a stage with painted scenery. Opening toward the picture's viewer is a fashionable assembly in a foreground resembling an arched proscenium, the trees shaped as curtains to frame a natural vista. The people are at once spectators and actors in a virtual theater that could be confused from afar for a dramatic production at Drury Lane. Among the men and women in this auto-voyeuristic fervor is an individual looking attentively at the viewer outside the frame: this is the politically outspoken socialite and avid theatergoer the Duchess of Devonshire, Georgiana Spencer (1757–1806). At the time this celebrated beauty donned the most flamboyant fashions, though she flouted the norms of aristocratic female propriety due to her controversial involvement in electoral politics, mounting gambling debts, and extramarital affairs. With her at the center of the crowd (and the painting), the stage is set for Georgian London's luminaries: standing beside the duchess is her sister Lady Duncannon (Harriet Fane); upstaging everyone is the macaroni standing beside the chubby man and boy, ogling the era's two famed beauties through

an eyeglass. This is Major Edward Topham, who served in a British regiment after touring Europe for eighteen months and was best known for his excessive dressiness and mannerisms.<sup>52</sup> His staring at Lady Duncannon dominates the visual field; we see her fetishized by a perverse macaroni more interested in seeing her than seeing the musicians playing behind him. Hidden within the multitude is the artist himself. Holding what looks like a sketchpad, Rowlandson peers between the duchess and Lady Duncannon.<sup>53</sup> His effigial self is an ironic meta-commentary that demonstrates how virtual visitation engenders satiric self-reflexivity. Rowlandson looks *with* and *as* Topham. Both men impertinently join the crowd, too obsessed with their own appearance and desire for upper-class damsels to notice the others. The print's viewers are swept up in this dizzying exchange of glances. They meet eye-to-eye with the duchess and the painter sketched within the crowd. *Vauxhall Gardens* collapses the normative distinction between polite and impolite spectatorship in true macaroni fashion.

Vauxhall and Ranelagh stimulated imaginative tourism abroad so that visitors could perform as foreign tourists on the lookout for female fairies—women who acted out the fantasy shown in Francis Hayman's and William Hogarth's painting. They accompany their "two Mahometan" avatars in an Arabian Nights setting to create themed visitations to other lands in one convenient locale.<sup>54</sup> The participant-tourist's subject position as a Muslim voyeur inhered within the constructed virtuality that Abu Talib would embody. He, like Rowlandson, adopted a deviant masculine persona among Vauxhall's charming fairy-like ladies.

## Abu Talib Khan in Fairyland

Having evaded court intrigues in the Indian state of Awadh, which drove him into poverty and depression as the British consolidated power in the region, Abu Talib found solace in touring London's sights. Londoners kindly took him to entertainments, where he networked with rich patrons and politicians via female powerbrokers while the British were at war with French, Irish, and Indian enemies.<sup>55</sup> He even kept a tour diary at the insistence of the duchess of Devonshire.<sup>56</sup> She hosted him regularly at Chiswick House and Gardens—renowned for its Greco-Roman statuary, picture gallery, and glamorous parties. The poet likened this villa, which the duchess called "her earthly paradise," to a "Garden of Eden" populated by "fairies."<sup>57</sup> Just as amazing to him

were the parklands at Windsor Palace, and in Bermondsey Spa Gardens he heard music by the prince of Wales's band that "realized the scenes described in the *Fairy Tales*, or the Arabian Nights' Entertainments."<sup>58</sup> But it was in Vauxhall and Ranelagh that he first met Englishwomen who actually performed as exotic fairies. Their sinful allure virtualized the *rihla* pilgrimage narrative, which gave this Persian stranger from paradise a reason to seek repentance in his Middle Eastern pilgrimage.

"Soon after my arrival in London," Abu Talib wrote in his travelogue, "an entertainment was given at Vauxhall for the benefit of some public charity." The garden's manager invited him to the event for free, saying "my appearance would be attended with great benefit to the undertaking." His new identity was *Prince Abu Taleb*, a title first conferred on him in newspaper advertisements for the event.<sup>59</sup> Much to his surprise, he was to play the character of "Persian prince," which the metropolitan news media reported as factual despite his protestations to the contrary. In other words, the manager had enlisted him for a marketing campaign to attract customers who could have fun living vicariously through an Oriental tourist. His body became a commodified effigy, the garden's new mascot. Seeing him onsite would have had the effect of making the "Mahometan" gazers shown in the supper box painting appear in the flesh before Londoners, like the turbaned tourists in the engraving of the South Walk (fig. 9.1).

The unspoken contract that the Persian prince made with Vauxhall's managers for the charity event helps explain why female fairy actors garner high praise in *Diwan-i Talib*. They are present everywhere in the city. After all, it was Georgiana Spencer and Mary Elford (1753–1817; née Davies) who inspired his poetry and helped him revise it. The latter took him to see Ranelagh and other London attractions with "her two angelic daughters."<sup>60</sup> Given this socialization, he adhered to the conventions of Central and South Asian *masnavis*, which commemorate beautiful female artisans inhabiting public places such as bazaars, baths, pavilions, and gardens in major urban centers. The central metaphor in this pastoral poetics was the Persianate ruler as a gardener tending his empire, a Qur'anic paradise on earth. Royal sovereignty found iconographic expression in enclosed natural habitats where feasting, wine-drinking, dancing, and music-playing revolved around unveiled ladies, who were compared to celestial objects, cypresses, songbirds, and fairies.<sup>61</sup> *Diwan-i Talib* transposed this Mughal arcadia onto London recreations that virtualized the city itself (as in "Ode to London") to cast the British Empire as a cosmological or divine force. In Ranelagh's "circular house"

Abu Talib saw its ceiling with “chandelier and lamps / Greater than the stars in the venerable sky,” the heavenly cosmos in motion. The carpeted floors were celestially oriented toward “a thousand moon-faced beauties walking delicately over it.”<sup>62</sup> Singing “like nightingales,” these ladies in circumambulation resembled Persian poetry’s delightful songbirds. The way that the poem treats “singers” and spectators as interchangeable groups was particular to the garden’s visitation practices. An even greater wonder was the “unrivalled Vauxhall,” which “steals the heart away much more” than Ranelagh. This sentiment was shared by tourists who lamented the latter’s faded splendor before it closed in 1803. The Vauxhall rotunda that was occasionally furnished as a Persian divan from 1790 onward inspired Abu Talib.<sup>63</sup> He compared female visitors to “cypresses in the spring wind” as “a crowd gathers everywhere / Such that an arriving angel would dance as well.” He described transforming in the space in an “enjoyment . . . so full of energy [that] it [was] impossible to control oneself.”<sup>64</sup> The enraptured speaker succumbed to the reverie of simming with female fairies.

The charity event most likely pertained to wartime processions staged at Vauxhall between July 1800 and August 1801. Reported in *The Times*, a “Superb Oriental Gala” remade the garden into a theater of war and peace celebrating the British military takeover of the Seringapatam fortress in the south Indian kingdom of Mysore on May 4, 1799. “A true scene of Eastern splendour” brought this decisive victory (which paved the way for British imperial expansion in India) to London via illuminated walks, “devices,” and “transparencies.” Spectators became virtual participants in “the late victorious Armies of the East, conquerors of [the Muslim ruler of Mysore] *Tippoo Saie Sultan*.” The procession featured “a most Magnificent TRIUMPHAL CAR, decorated with superb military trophies, attended by Sepoys [Indian soldiers in British regiments], . . . and drawn by ELEPHANTS . . . in a stile [*sic*] of Oriental grandeur”; it paraded on “the principal walk” behind the Duke of York’s martial band “performing . . . Indostan airs.”<sup>65</sup> Audiences enjoyed the procession so much that it was assimilated into the garden’s repertoire one year later. A “magnificent gala” was held several nights in August 1801, featuring the Duke of York’s band in “Eastern” costume on an “Oriental Car . . . drawn by Elephants,” and ending with fireworks or a masquerade.<sup>66</sup> On another evening, masqueraders costumed as “Jews, Turks, and Christians, promenading with equal gaiety.”<sup>67</sup> These immersive performances ceased to function as nationalist propaganda when garden visitors performed as itinerant foreigners rather than British patriots. Imperialist jingoism yielded to

communal abandon, since everyone—even Abu Talib—virtually traveled not to Seringapatam’s battlefield, but to a cosmopolitan fairyland where Easterners reigned supreme.

Abu Talib would have been at home in this Indian-themed atmosphere, what he called “a Garden of Eden.” His verses omit any political messages related to the crowds that watched each other enjoying the processional elephants. Vauxhall disoriented his eyes, as he joltingly described its many “wonderful things” in quick succession: “fireworks” going off “in one direction,” tin cascades in another, and, even more astonishing, “a street of artificial elephants / With fifty people on its back.”

These verses have a comical or satirical ring, insofar as the poet refrains from describing the serious martial context in which the elephant procession was set. The fifty performers take frivolous pleasure in riding these animals “a lot.” Abu Talib performed the reflective satirizing at play in Rowlandson’s painting. Like the painter, the poet loses himself in self-regarding collective spectating, and this disorientation results in a reassessment of cultural and religious norms for Indian readers to ponder:

If you saw this scene with your own eyes  
 You would no longer enjoy your own deathly pale face  
 Because I too am now embarrassed  
 Of that wrong suspicion [I had] of pleasure and enjoyment<sup>68</sup>

The Muslim tourist reprimands prudish countrymen, including his former self, for frowning upon this joyful display. Had they been there, they would have become ashamed of their moral restraint (symbolized in the “deathly pale face”).

London’s pleasure gardens reoriented the ascetic morality that Abu Talib held dear before sailing west. Mughal intellectuals believed that the basis for a well-ordered virtuous government lies in the regulation of the body’s appetites. Excessive stimuli were deemed harmful for the soul and the state, and thus abstention from lust, hunger, and greed ensured the body politic’s health, precisely what Abu Talib had argued in his “Treatise on Ethics” (composed between 1793 and 1796). For him, a man is truly masculine—and thereby qualified to govern an empire—when reason, courage, and continence are in balance.<sup>69</sup> What he felt at Vauxhall not only disbalanced these categories but also suggested that hedonism was a civic virtue. The unbridled passions that overpowered the Persian prince upon seeing such an earthly paradise among

other self-indulgent visitors invalidated the treatise's prescribed asceticism, as he now rejected his past "suspicion of pleasure and enjoyment."

The crowds so easily amused by elephant-riding nonetheless reflected a seeming cultural decadence. At first glance, Vauxhall's paintings, such as *Fairies Dancing on the Green by Moonlight*, endorsed frivolous games and amorous intrigues. Yet Abu Talib's closer inspection revealed the vanity of such trifles: "The English are like flowers with thorns of unfaithfulness." These artistically inclined people were irreligious because "with the intelligence of philosophers, they [love to] play games."<sup>70</sup> This observation corresponds to his critique of English "appetites" in *Masir-i Talibi*, which maintained that "luxurious living generates many disorders."<sup>71</sup> What this Muslim witnessed at Vauxhall showed him that the empire-as-garden was trending toward hedonistic excesses that threatened to undermine ascetic masculine governance as expounded in his treatise. Without reforming their manners according to Islamic abstinence, the English seemed doomed to become "effeminate" as their civilization followed the historical path that had brought destruction to the Roman and Mughal Empires.<sup>72</sup> The way Abu Talib articulated this critique, while also participating in immorality, was a mediational act intrinsic to the gardens' design; and so vices lead to virtues and vice versa.

His own circular itinerary operated similarly. Abu Talib departed Calcutta as a leisurely tourist on a quest to see Europe's worldly wonders, and returned a pious pilgrim enraptured with Islam's otherworldly wonders. Absorbing virtues that he would later condemn as vices provided the rationale for his pilgrimage. After reaching the region known today as Iraq he repented his sinful life among English fairies at the Shi'i shrines of Imam Husayn ibn 'Ali and Zayn-al 'Abidin.<sup>73</sup> Without visiting fairyland before heading east, he would have seemingly had no reason to ask for repentance; in other words, without indulging in modern tourism there would have been no pilgrimage to perform. Only by participating in London's diversions to the max could he afterwards perform like a contrite Shi'i for his Indian audience. What may seem like an irreligious urge to abandon "the Toba, Sudreh, or other trees of Paradise" for England's "heart-alluring Damsels" set the parameters for refashioning his Muslim identity. Abu Talib contradictorily embodied a subset of the tourist gaze, what Urry and Larsen call the "reverential gaze:" when pilgrims visually fixate on sacred objects of worship, such as relics and shrines.<sup>74</sup> Obsessive voyeurism in *Diwan-i Talib* Persianizes the eroticized female body to figuratively perform Sufi reverence for God's creation.

The aesthetic immersions discussed in this essay unfold inwardly like a

mobius strip, blurring the boundary between artificiality and authenticity: the “two Mahometans” gazing in wonder step off the canvas to inhabit the garden’s ground via another picture featuring two turbaned voyeurs in the South Walk; Rowlandson, in sketching the garden’s famous female beauties, projected himself onto the canvas in cahoots with a macaroni ogler, and the emasculated painter and his Oriental avatars were reincarnated virtually in Abu Talib upon morphing into the womanizing Persian prince at Vauxhall. Only then did he reenter a first-order reality to fulfil spiritually his eastward journey. Each scenario was a self-reflective circuit wherein one transit ended when another began as normative masculinities approximated their opposites in a disorienting infolding circle. It is at the vanishing edges of this virtual circulation that gendered subjects revisited themselves to discover new shared identities, remaking sexual vices into civic virtues from within Vauxhall and Ranelagh’s pioneering theme park-like theatricality. Under their “terrestrial Cypresses” guests collectively enacted virtual visitations to the Islamic Orient as they deviated from social expectations alongside the manly Persian prince. On debut there was a practice of touristic gazing remarkably conducive to East-West transculturation along the axis of Persianate gender norms in South Asia.

## Notes

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39. Qtd. in Sands, 41.
40. *Ambulator*, 178.
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66. “Vauxhall,” *The Morning Post* (London), August 8, 1801, 1.

67. “Vauxhall” and “Vauxhall Grand Gala,” *The Morning Post*. Also, see “Vauxhall,” in the same newspaper, August 31, 1801, 1.

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## SECTION FOUR

# All the World's a Stage

## *Planetary Visitations*

Mary Louise Pratt

### Who Just Came in the Door?

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020–2022 disrupted just about every practice of visitation that existed on the planet, and indeed every practice of human mobility—from international travel to trips to the food market, from pilgrimages to hospital visits. Almost everyone alive experienced new configurations of going and staying, both voluntary and involuntary. Many scripts and stagings for tourism had to be interrupted and new ones invented. Leisure and travel were decoupled as resorts, cruises, and parks shut down. In the aftermath of that planetarized experiment, the still unsettled present offers a fruitful moment for creative reflection on visitation, staging, and mobility.

Visitation requires at least two participants, a party who arrives and a party who is in place (“at home”) to receive them.<sup>1</sup> In the small town where I grew up in the 1950s the local paper featured a weekly column listing who had visited or been visited by whom the previous week. The public record was part of the visit’s staging, and it honored the role of travel in community life. But often, as in most of the cases examined in this book, visitation involves a third participant, which we might call “the exhibit,” that is, some special or unusual thing that occasions the visitation, something the visitor either comes to see, or brings to show. In those same small towns, before TV and mass tourism set in, professional visitors would arrive to perform lectures, films, or slide shows about their travels to exotic places, attended by townspeople who would fill high school auditoriums or legion halls to experience travel vicariously. Other kinds of traveling performers came too: magicians, hypnotists, actors, door-to-door salesmen, and portrait photographers.

This model of visitation and performance is as old as communal life itself. In medieval Europe you could make a living traveling from village to village to exhibit a saint's bone, a dancing bear, or to tell a story. Emily St. John Mandel brings that model back to life in the twenty-first century, in her post-apocalyptic novel *Station Eleven*, also a hit television series. The story involves a group of people who, after a global pandemic wipes out most of the world's population, form an itinerant acting group that tours among the small communities of survivors around the Great Lakes, performing Shakespeare and classical music.<sup>2</sup>

Itinerant performers bring the exhibit with them, as touring musicians still do. With tourism, on the other hand, hosts offer exhibits to attract and enchant visitors. Places are made into destinations through processes of fabrication, orchestration, and staging, like Rapid City's Dinosaur Park Scott Magelssen discusses below. And, of course, "place" always involves nonhuman entities and agents—animals and plants, climates and weather, configurations of earth, air, fire, water, human-made architecture, built environments, and displayed objects. "Planetarity," in this sense of engagement with the more-than-human, is built into tourism. Indeed, as many of us are now learning to notice, it is built into life—embodied humans are always located in some ecologically and historically specific place. In the subjects of this section's essays—safaris (Lewis), roadside attractions (Magelssen), and experimental performance art (Twardowski)—that more-than-human engagement is the thing staged, the exhibit around which host/guest relations are configured and performed.

In Magelssen and Twardowski's essays the monumentalist geography of the US West and Southwest is both the location and the thing showcased. In the US cultural imaginary, those vast landscapes are constructs of the imperial imagination and the national epic of white westward expansion. Here, another aspect of planetarity is key: the dimension of *scale*. Staged for visitors, the vastness of western geography embodied the scale of American aspirations—the greatness to which America aspired—materialized metonymically in the gigantic heads of Mount Rushmore.<sup>3</sup> This "greatness" scale, as Magelssen points out, finds an animal coordinate in the figure of the dinosaur, the attraction Rapid City offers to orchestrate tourist desires. Gigantic creatures inhabiting a vast more-than-human timescale, dinosaurs also, as Magelssen argues, played a role configuring the US's version of imperial masculinity. In this respect, it is fascinating that little boys in the US are taught early, from endless illustrated books, about the terrifying scale and ferocity

of dinosaurs, and receive basketfuls of miniaturized versions to play with as toys in games where the human child becomes the gigantic being. Along with superhero paraphernalia and whole universes of toy weaponry, they are part of the apparatus that plant the seeds of US masculinity.

In the twenty-first century dinosaurs have acquired a new resonance as a textbook case of mass extinction due to climate change, a parable of catastrophe on the monumental and planetary scale many lifeforms now face once again—the so-called sixth extinction.<sup>4</sup> While Rapid City's run-down dinosaur park is on its way to extinction, or at least a radical makeover, the Afrofuturist artists Weston Twardowski studies—Lisa E. Harris and Alisha B. Wormsley—visit Southwestern geography not to contemplate its vastness, nor inhabit it in settler fashion, but to orchestrate unique place-based performances that engage each site's distinctive geography and history. The Afrofuturist engagement is driven not by imperial nostalgia (as in the oft-heard remark "Imagine how this must have looked to the first explorers who saw it") but by the intention to annul white imperialism, claim spaces safe for Blackness, and introduce possibilities of being otherwise. If the Rapid City dinosaur park is embedded in the nineteenth-century conquest narrative whose imagined future was white, Lisa Harris and Alisha Wormsley's performances are animated by the decolonial energies that, alongside environmental uncertainties, empower Black and Indigenous people as knowledge-makers and future-builders in the twenty-first century.

In Africa, as Megan Lewis says, an equally imperial model of travel, the safari, was a founding device for staged visitation, in what eventually came to be the category of adventure tourism. With safaris, host-guest relations mimic familiar imperial scripts of explorers/hunters traveling across open country with native guides and lines of bearers, producing experiences of "nostalgia, adventure, attentive service, and the 'wildness' of the experience."<sup>5</sup> These experiences are staged by hosts operating the safaris, and also taught to visitors who participate in them. The role of instruction is important.<sup>6</sup> Animal sightings "generate a unique affective thrill for individual tourists" because tourists are instructed on how they should respond to them, and to everything else on the safari. Successful visitations require visitors to learn how to play their role and what experiences to have. Travelers know this. It's part of what they pay for. Safaris are one of a whole repertoire of ways people organize and sacralize their contact with other animals.

As this volume richly shows, visitation scripts and products continuously mutate and evolve. In the 1980s and '90s, emerging environmental

consciousness gave rise to eco-tourism, a paradigm itself now put in peril by the environmental degradation it sought to forestall. In the new millennium, environmental degradation, climate change, extractive capitalism, and forces of decolonization have altered patterns of mobility on a planetary scale. The global tourist industry now coexists with transcontinental South to North migration, travel that is something like the opposite of visitation. Unlike visiting, this mass human displacement aims to be non-circular, from homelands where survival has become difficult or impossible, to places where one is largely unwelcome, even illegal. The thing sought is not leisure but work and safety. This mass movement is scripted and choreographed by an unregulated, ruthless human trafficking industry, whose agents (unlike those of tourism) have no obligation to supply their clients with sustenance, comfort, safety, or pleasurable experiences. There are no refunds.

In the new millennium, as Twardowski's essay exemplifies, environmental collapse and the crisis of futurity have made the planetary, more-than-human dimensions of visitation available for analysis with new clarity and urgency. As global warming increasingly destabilizes geographies, ecologies, and built environments, planetary consciousness intensifies. Uncertainty settles in. Circuits of visitation become susceptible to disruption, attractions lose their attractiveness, at times literally evaporating (like the Great Salt Lake). In 2023 alone, Venice flooded, Maui burned, torrential rain turned Burning Man's desert site into a mud bath, Spain baked in record heat, Acapulco underwent a category 5 hurricane for the first time in its history. At a planetary scale, meteorologists declared it the "world's hottest year." And yet, perhaps perversely, these new extremes can themselves become attractions. In July 2023, when forecasters predicted record high temperatures in Death Valley in Southern California, hundreds of humans hopped in their cars and drove there to experience the new extreme—a spontaneous, self-staged visitation. Some wore fur coats to add to the fun. A month later, people were attracted back to the same place, to see a brand new four-mile-long lake created by unprecedented rainfall that followed the heat. This all followed on a rare "superbloom" of flowers that carpeted the same hills the previous spring. No one knows what will happen next, anywhere.

Unsurprisingly, "extreme" has become a keyword in the lexicon of twenty-first-century visitation. The post-millennium has given rise to a new script of "extreme" adventure travel that stages highly individualized, planetarized experiences of danger, hardship, suffering, and endurance. Extreme visitation is scripted as a suspense drama in which travelers expose themselves to

real (though still staged) danger, often through extreme physical challenge in inclement places like Mount Everest, the Yungas mountain road in Bolivia (whose staging as the Road of Death made it into a cycling attraction), or the town of Oymyakon, Siberia now known as the Pole of Cold. The prize in extreme visitation is the survival of the protagonist and the symbolic conquest (through the fact of one's bodily presence) of the site's more-than-human challenges. Unlike safaris, colonial comfort and imperial nostalgia are not only absent, but deliberately excluded from the experience. Focused on human heroics, the model bypasses problems like animal exploitation and extinction that compromise the safari. Geography is both site and attraction, the planetary wonder orchestrated to generate a suspense narrative of danger and survival. In June 2023 an extreme visitation became a global media event when, tragically, it failed. Five humans each paid a small fortune to sit in a cramped metal cylinder designed to transport them twelve-and-a-half-thousand feet under the North Atlantic Ocean to view the wreckage of the Titanic. Minutes after departure, they disappeared—the cylinder, already diagnosed with metal fatigue, had imploded. Though it was obvious to many what had happened from the beginning, the submersible's disappearance set in motion a fantasy-driven, high-tech search and rescue drama that was at least as staged as the expedition itself. The whole world was riveted.<sup>7</sup>

Against such twenty-first century, first world scripts, the boldness, originality, and radicality of Harris and Wormsley's Afrofuturist artistry stand out. Alongside the real experience of migrant peril, and the staged peril of extreme tourism, the two artists aspired to create novel experiences of safety and belonging in the name of those from whom both were historically withheld. The image of Afronauts in the desert conveys the disruptive reach of their vision: they call us to reimagine the universe, the very nature of being, human and otherwise (many of today's Indigenous thinkers share this cosmic ambition). They explore deserts because history has made Black and Indigenous people into experts at joyful survivance in the inhospitable places to which they are so often relegated.<sup>8</sup> In the crisis of futurity, they have the knowledge that everyone now needs.

How to enact such ambitions in works of performance and visitation? How to stage them in ways that produce not just another script, but unique experiences of possibility? How to marshal the familiar vastness of the Southwest to such a task? The toolkit, Twardowski makes clear, is radically multiplicitous, too varied to become a formula. Its exuberant variety opens spaces of pure heterogeneity. Anything can be put to use here: history, flight instruc-

tions, string—anything that can create experiences of freedom, fluidity, and possibility. Like a guide, Twardowski instructs audiences how to experience this creative work in the fullness of its intention. It will never have a repertoire, a palette, a plot, a recognizable soundtrack. As the climate catastrophe unfolds (and it will for a very long time) the most important question for humans often remains unaddressed: How is this process to be lived, and lived well, as humans face a slow demise? Harris and Wormsley's performance art seems to offer a path, or at least the search for one.

The concept of *buen vivir*, to live well, has become key in contemporary Latin American Indigenous thought, as a means for humanity to reimagine the future—*Sumak kawsay* in the original Quechua. The concept refers to a way of living that strives to keep all existents in balance.<sup>9</sup> Survivors of genocide and enslavement are sending out the message that futures, however full of hardship and suffering, can and must be lived with beauty, joy, music, and dance, or they are not worth living at all. Declaring his Cree people “masters of extinction,” having lived for centuries in harsh conditions and faced repeated devastating loss, Indigenous Canadian playwright and theorist Tomson Highway says: “The most important thing my parents taught me was to laugh.”<sup>10</sup> In Highway's *buen vivir*, the central principles for maintaining balance are pleasure and joy. If you, I, and we are not laughing, we are not living well. These, the playful, irreverent arts of the trickster, have been essential to Cree survivance. They are cultivated and nourished. These arts, Highway argues, are critical for facing our uncertain future. Amid change, loss, death, and extinction, humans must work to keep their love of the world alive and powerful—a love of the world that, in different forms, energizes the travelers Magelssen and Lewis study.

In a 2014 lecture I heard, Highway offered a sentence that, in a room full of Cree speakers, reliably triggers instant hilarity. In English it means: “Who just came in the door?” I imagined how this could indeed always be funny—watch out, the door's open, anything could happen here right now. That may be the model for visitation our certain-to-be-uncertain future calls for.

## Notes

1. Mary Louise Pratt, *Planetary Longings* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022), chapter 3.

2. Emily St. John Mandel, *Station Eleven* (Toronto: Knopf, 2014).

3. Such “greatness” resonances are noticeably absent in the Canadian settler imaginary, where the West's vastness is far more likely to be coded as frightening and dangerous, and the idea of carving prime ministers into a cliff would be hilarious.

4. Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (New York: Holt, 2021).

5. Megan Lewis, "H(a)unting Africa: A dazzle of competing narratives," chapter 10 in this volume.

6. Mary Louise Pratt, *Planetary Longings*, chapter 8.

7. The twenty-first-century cult of extreme travel also generated two very popular reality TV franchises, "The Amazing Race" and "Survivor." Both are staged as competitions in which, in stark contrast with leisure tour scripts, teams take on challenges and face obstacles in a world indifferent to their needs and desires. Both use the planet in its entirety as their stage, and operate along a Global North/Global South axis. In only a few short years, both have had to adjust their formulas in response to environmental degradation and geopolitical destabilization.

8. Survivance is a term coined by Anishinaabe (Chippewa) theorist Gerald Vizenor to refer to modes of being Indigenous people have developed through which they are able not merely to survive, but to sustain an active, creative, process of becoming "sustained by stories" that "renounce domination, tragedy, and victimry." *Manifest Manners: Narratives of Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 199; vii.

9. Eduardo Gudynas, "Buen Vivir: Today's Tomorrow," *Development* 54, no. 4 (2011): 441–447.

10. Tomson Highway, *Laughing with the Trickster: On Sex, Death, and Accordions* (Toronto: Anansi, 2022), XX. For further elaboration of these ideas, see Mary Louise Pratt, "Lessons for Losing," *Critical Times* 6, no. 2 (August 2023): 167–178; Tomson Highway, Keynote address, Encuentro of the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, Montreal, 2014.

## CHAPTER 10

# H(a)unting Africa

## *A Dazzle of Competing Narratives*

Megan Lewis

### Performing Wild Africa

From the fictions of Hollywood films and amusement parks to historic and contemporary tourism practices, safari *performs Africa*. Brochures offer tourists fantasies of romantic nostalgia, thrilling adventure, or benevolent ways to “give back” to local and Indigenous communities. Safaris and game drives are carefully stage-managed to give visitors a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Tourists are invited to capture animal souvenirs via camera or rifle, and their trophies then perform memory and *haunt* after the *hunt*. Valued at USD 36.07 billion in 2024 and forecasted to grow to USD 51.46 billion by 2030,<sup>1</sup> the global safari tourism market is a major source of revenue and national pride for many countries, especially South Africa, Tanzania, Kenya, and Zimbabwe. For V. Y. Mudimbe, “The very idea of ‘Africa’ call[s] for a predictable assortment of dramatic expectations.”

This chapter investigates how safari deploys theatrical conventions (choreographies, dramaturgies, setting, character, and embodiment) to tell a recurring story about Africa. Safari practice trades in competing discourses of thanatourism (trophy hunting), ecotourism (green hunts),<sup>2</sup> and conservation (preservation intertwined with hunting),<sup>3</sup> *figuratively casting* animals as performers to play out fantasies of wildness and *literally casting* animals as trophies. Both hunting advocates and conservationists leverage notions of life and death in their attempts to convince audiences of future tourists the best path for Africa’s future, staging and waging a battle for hearts, minds, and dollars.<sup>4</sup> Within these debates, what is the role of an ethical tourist? What does safari ask its visitors to perform? Subtling my chapter with the collec-

tive noun for zebras I explore how competing narratives *dazzle*, how they reflect the diversity of stories about safari. Zebras appear black and white, yet the reality of safari is far more nuanced and complex.

The tourist encounter known as safari comes from the Kiswahili word for *journey*, from the Arabic verb *safara*, to travel. First coined in 1859, *safari* referred to the caravan and equipment of an (East) African hunting expedition or “sporting safari.” One of the most renowned safaris occurred in 1909 when former US President Theodore Roosevelt made an expedition to Kenya, Congo, and Sudan with his son Kermit. Together, they shot and killed 512 large game and collected over 11,000 specimens including plants, insects, and smaller game. These specimens began the Smithsonian’s extensive African collection in the National Museum of Natural History in Washington DC.

Today, safaris are expeditions to observe or hunt animals in their natural habitat, “shoot” wildlife (with guns or cameras), and experience camping (or glamping) outdoors. Most safari travelers are Global Northerners visiting locations in the Global South, specifically the African continent. They combine the thrill of the exotic with the comforts of home. Across miles of bush, porters historically carried gramophones, china, baths, bedding, tents, and cooking equipment as well as rifles, field dressing, and trophy preservation supplies. In the 1985 Academy Award-winning film *Out of Africa*, for example, Denys Finch Hatton (Robert Redford) woos Isak Dinesen (Meryl Streep) on safari, playing Mozart on his gramophone, dining on linen tablecloths under the fever trees, and rinsing her hair with river water from a porcelain pitcher—demonstrating how the safari imaginary is entangled with narratives of civilizational progress and practices of (neo)colonial opulence.

As I will discuss, safari relies on dramaturgies and choreographies that enact fantasies of “Africa” for paying tourists. First, safari repeatedly circulates fantasies around the concept of “wild Africa” or “wilderness.”<sup>55</sup> Historically, The West, now known as the Global North, narrated the African continent as a space of untamed wilderness, what Jonathan Adams and Thomas McShane describe as “a place beyond human control, where order breaks down . . . Wilderness is beyond Eden’s walls . . . where man must go when he is cast out of paradise.”<sup>56</sup> Fantasies of herds of animals across wide open expanses of the Serengeti dominate the Western imagination. In his history of safari, Bartle Bull describes how, when Europeans first explored the African interior in the early nineteenth century, “Antelope covered the savannah like a carpet. Lions were literally pests. One might see 150 rhinoceros in a day . . . To the European hunter, Africa was Eden.”<sup>57</sup> Wilderness is thus a fab-

ricated construct of the colonial imagination; a narrative about the continent imposed from the outside.

Second, framing Africa as “wild” is part of a long history of Western imaginings about the continent as exotic and foreign. Through nineteenth-century travelogues and fiction from *King Solomon’s Mines* to Hemingway,<sup>8</sup> as well as through popular Hollywood films,<sup>9</sup> Africa has been repeatedly mythologized as a romantic canvas for Western fantasy, as a dark foil to European accomplishment,<sup>10</sup> or as a virally contaminated contrast to structures of purity and whiteness.<sup>11</sup> For Mary Battiata, the 1985 film *Out of Africa* “is the same stuff that has been selling East Africa to westerners for at least a century, from the exploits of Stanley and Livingstone to Joy Adamson’s *Born Free*.” She describes the film’s characters as “feudal and highly romantic figures, players in a white man’s paradise, attended by an exotic choir of curious Africans who keep a respectful distance.”<sup>12</sup> Haunted by the legacies of imperialism, Africa has also been framed through what Anne McClintock calls an “erotics of ravishment,”<sup>13</sup> as virgin *terra nullius*, teeming with resources ripe for the picking.

## Safari Fictions and Performance

Depictions of Africa are often enmeshed in discourses of primitivism, social hierarchy, and racism, depicting Africa as a generic wilderness where one location can stand in for any part of the continent, populated by teeming plains of wildlife and savage or inconsequential natives who serve as dark antagonists to European movie stars or simply blend into the background. Safari films promote ideas about the continent that justify its exploitation, its need for rescue, its wildness and savagery, and the white savior complex of Western heroes. Such films help write the narrative of Africa for the rest of the world, creating colonial imaginaries where “great white hunters” are heroes and natives are willing conveyors (porters) of their spoils for foreign export.<sup>14</sup> This colonial imaginary, for Sylvie Chalaye, complete with its “phantasmagorical images . . . born at the back of our conscience,” was created to maintain the “fantasy of an Africa that corresponded with Western expectations and justified the policy of occupation.”<sup>15</sup>

The historic practice of safari involved Africans performing for foreign clients, both in the sense of performing a *task or a duty* and performing a *role* in the Western story of Africa. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century safaris, wealthy Europeans and Americans paid exorbitant fees for their entourage:

porters, cooks, gunbearers, horse boys, tent and bath men, and *askari* guards—not to mention legendary hunter-trackers such as R. J. Cunningham—all of whom performed a variety of roles replicating the comforts of the West while out on safari.<sup>16</sup> Contemporary safaris similarly perform an idea of Africa for visitors, steeped in nostalgia, adventure, attentive service, and the “wildness” of the experience. True to the hospitality industry’s mission of catering to tourist desires, serving staff learn your cocktail preference on day one and greet every returning game drive with a warm towel and personalized drink in hand. In promotional materials, safari staff pose before a cornucopia of culinary delights: an African bounty is on offer, always ready to serve, always ripe for consumption. Guides and trackers stage-manage game drives, and their charming personalities influence how visitors encounter fauna and flora. Professional Hunters are not only responsible for safety and ethics on a hunt, they also serve as the best storytellers around the nightly fire. Safaris are experienced in real time but narrated after the fact: from recounting the details of the day’s hunt around the campfire to sharing travel photographs once back home. Safari is as much about the stories you leave with as the actual experience.

Perhaps the most obvious performance of safari can be found in the contemporary amusement park industry. In her analysis of Disney’s Animal Kingdom (DAK), performance scholar Shelly R. Scott contemplates the juxtaposition of real, live animals in the park with cartoon characters, examining “how reality, fiction, and hyperreality work together in performances of nature staged for consumption by tourists.” She traces how production values—an “airbrushed simulation of reality”—subsume the purported conservation education messages built into the park: “performance overwhelms ecology at DAK.”<sup>17</sup> The Kilimanjaro Safari attraction at DAK is a simulated game drive through the African savannah in open-sided vehicles that showcases sixteen different African species, from rhinos, hippos, and giraffes to zebras, wildebeests, and Nile crocodiles, all displayed together in enclosures despite the diversity of their actual natural habitats. Signs give the impression that the animals are free and wild, skittish enough to flee from vehicles if there is too much noise. DAK, like the trademarked Edge of Africa® safaris at Busch Gardens,<sup>18</sup> builds dramatic elements into what is essentially a glorified zoo display. Disney cultivates a perceived sense of danger, where guides stage radio calls about poachers in the area and the proximity of “wild” animals. The fantasy of the visitor’s experience relies on the illusion that the animals are right next to you. The park is full of “scripted surprises” and the animals

are “manipulated performers,” who perform roaming freely but are actually “merely moving from one disguised feeder to the next,” what Scott calls “a matter of stagecraft, not nature.”<sup>19</sup>

Visitors to DAK experience a simulacrum of Africa designed to replicate a safari down to the smallest details, including ruts in the mud where the game vehicles drive. One visitor I spoke to at DAK told me how “real” it felt to drive so close to the animals.<sup>20</sup> Yet, this is a generic Africa loaded with trappings that communicate authenticity. In what Scott Magelssen calls an “experience-based engagement,” visitors “travel without getting dirty,” visiting a domesticated fantasy without any risk-taking, travel, or physical encounter with Africa, Africans, or animals in the wild.<sup>21</sup> As Shelly Scott affirms, even as tourists experience an “imitation of an African savannah and its simulation of chasing after poachers, [and as] the illusions of proximity and danger are mimetically produced . . . they know it is fictional from the outset.”<sup>22</sup> Disney’s Africa relies on visitors’ suspension of disbelief. I interviewed several families at DAK, who all acknowledged the fiction of this Africa, but who consciously sought out the fantasy nonetheless. When I asked why they chose Disney over an actual trip to Africa, they cited costs and lengthy travel, avoiding fears of malaria or traveler’s diarrhea, and that Disney’s Africa came with a meal plan included.<sup>23</sup>

Tourists visiting Africa on actual safaris also desire a version of the continent that performs their fantasies. Safaris are often framed as a return to our human African origins, “that unmistakable feeling of coming home, back to where it all began.”<sup>24</sup> Safari operators, trackers, and service workers strive to replicate such fantasies as they vie for tourist dollars, blending origin stories with *Out of Africa* romance, combining Hemingway’s masculine chase with Disney’s landscape of anthropomorphized animals. What makes an actual safari affectively engaging is that visitors experience their African fantasies within physical African settings, supported by a cast of live performers, wildlife, and storytellers. Safaris include a dress code (costuming): bush jackets, pith helmets, khaki clothing, linen suits, or animal skin patterns. Safari outfitters from South Africa to Kenya feed this fantasy in their promotional materials, offering eco-luxury excursions in safari camp style that also promise an “authentic” African experience. They promote sorties in “untouched” locations, replicating age-old notions of an unspoiled, virgin Africa that are also counterbalanced by amenities and practices that confirm and/or reify the continent’s colonial subjugation.

Safari’s particular form of staging place entails camp furnishings that play

on romanticized notions of the past. Mosquito nets may serve a practical purpose, but they also set the *mise-en-scène*. Antique artifacts add to the nostalgia of bush tents in South Africa's Kruger National Park; when I visited, my own tent included an enamel wash bowl, copies of Hemingway's books, and bullet casings and shaving brushes in a display cabinet. All these simulacra of authenticity are central selling points that speak to enduring tourist desires as historic "Dark Africa" is replaced by "Real Africa." Rattan chairs around a fire locate visitors as audience members for nightly storytelling. Firelight illuminates the camp's cocoon of safety, beyond which the cold, dark night feeds fearful fantasies that send shivers up their spines.

Visitors on safaris experience Africa's liveness, authenticating the stage-managed reperformance of classic safari tropes for contemporary tourists. And what makes Africa feel most "live" and "real" are its animals. For Curtis A. Keim, "African animals deeply shape our understanding of the continent."<sup>25</sup> Safaris rely on showing animals (in both live and taxidermized forms) in order to generate a sense of authenticity and adventure. The hunt's suspense-filled dramaturgy, or the painstaking effort to track and (photographically) capture big game, generate unique affective thrills. Safari operators stage manage the experience to feel serendipitous for individuals, but also replicable over time for many visitors. The negotiation between travelers and safari operators is a feedback loop: the West feeds on ideas about Africa, and Africans then replicate that fantasy to sell back to Western tourists to keep much-needed dollars flowing.

## Africa Up Close and Personal

On an evening drive in Kruger National Park we found a big male lion walking along the road. We were so close I could smell him. There was a palpable tension in the vehicle, a combination of titillation at being so close and the fear and danger of that proximity. What if he had refused to be followed? Or got annoyed? Or decided to stop and pay attention to us? As the lion walked on with the inattention of an animal very used to safari vehicles, I mused over our human tendency to invent narratives about animals that play out dramatic scenarios—and animals' indifference to our fantasies.

Game drives and walking safaris are driven by the thrill of proximity. The closer visitors can get to animals, the more excited they become and the better their opportunities for photos. The pleasure of immediacy to wildness has led

to some contentious safari industry practices wherein tourists pay to have up close and personal animal experiences. Various animal interactions include riding safaris (where patrons joyride atop elephants or ostriches), walking or sleeping with cheetahs, hand-feeding giraffes and antelopes, and swimming with great white sharks. These animals are, however, wild creatures, unpredictable and dangerous. Despite the fascination with animals attacking humans on social media and YouTube videos, the world was shocked when, in 2015, Katherine Chappell was mauled to death by a lion at Lion Park in Johannesburg, after she opened a window to take photographs. Her desire for proximity, and failure to heed multiple warnings about staying securely in the car, cost the American tourist her life. In 2020, the Southern Africa Tourism Services Association (SATSA), outlawed Captive Wildlife Interactions for Tourists, including tactile interactions with infant wild animals, predators or cetaceans, walking with predators or elephants, and riding animals. Interestingly, SATSA's reasoning focused on the animals *performing*. It concluded that "there is no educational or conservation value in watching animals perform unnaturally."<sup>26</sup> For an animal to perform in a public show or display, the logic went, training would have been necessary, and many training techniques (e.g., corporal punishment, tethering and/or food deprivation) were deemed damaging to the animals.

Travelers go to Africa to see animals in their natural habitats, yet the notion of "in the wild," as William Cronon argues, is "quite profoundly a human creation."<sup>27</sup> Robin Derricourt asserts that African wilderness continues to be framed by romantic primitivism: "unspoiled landscapes, exotic wildlife, rural people leading simpler and more honest lives."<sup>28</sup> This fantasy ignores the reality of corporations buying up blocks of grazing land and wild animals being sold at auction for American tourists to hunt. The complex reality of this industry is that there is both public and private use of wildlife, with game owned or managed by private ranchers, national park veterinarians, game capture outfits, breeding projects, and tourist operators.<sup>29</sup> Animal herds are managed to ensure their genetic and individual health and survival; they are traded and moved to ensure sustainable use of land resources and maintain sustainable animal populations. Wild spaces are fenced (often with electric fences) to keep animals in and poachers out. Animals are bred and their populations strategically maintained for safari tourism, for hunting, and for conservation of species. In South Africa alone, these endeavors bring revenue that fuels the economy to the tune of R402bn, accounting for 9.3% of GDP in 2016.<sup>30</sup> The reality is this industry is a carefully managed economic



Figure 10.1. Lion walking by Safari goers. Image by the author.



Figure 10.2. Lion walking by Safari goers. Image by the author.



Figure 10.3. Game capture demonstrates the hidden labor behind the scenes of managing a giraffe. Image by the author.

driver; however, the fantasy tourism sells about safari is based on “*pretending* the land is unspoiled wilderness.”<sup>31</sup>

### Dramaturgy of the Game Drive

The central act of the contemporary tourist safari is the game drive. Dawn and dusk drives bookend each safari day, with siestas during the hottest parts, when animals are least active. Guests climb aboard specialized  $4 \times 4$  safari vehicles with canopies to shade the sun and raked seats so that each audience member gets a good view. The tracker rides on the vehicle bonnet while the guide narrates a story about the wildlife encountered. During my research for this project in 2017, I experienced 24 game drives, the dramaturgy of which follows a typical script and set of conventions:

*Curtain Speech*—The guide welcomes guests and starts with a safety talk, reminding everyone to keep inside the vehicle's profile, since predators ignore the shape of the truck, but can identify an individual body or appendage as prey. Next, guides manage expectations, explaining that wild animals are unpredictable and unscripted; we may see many or few, large or small species. Guides assess what their visitors anticipate seeing; though they usually set expectations low, they customize their drives toward the guests' hopes and desires. Though it may be part of the job, my guides all affirmed that fulfilling these desires is a joyful act of national identity and social grace, a mark of the hosts' pride to offer hospitality.

What visitors to South Africa want to see usually includes the Big Five (so named as they are the most difficult to hunt on foot)—lion, leopard, rhinoceros, elephant, and Cape buffalo (they are also known as “charismatic megafauna”).<sup>32</sup> Often, people also seek out the Ugly Five—wildebeest, warthog, marabou stork, vulture, and hippo. It is rare that visitors ask to see smaller animals like the Little Five (leopard tortoise, ant lion, buffalo beetle, rhino beetle, and elephant shrew), although avian species are quite popular among birders. Animals are typecast in these roles, shorthand rubrics that give visitors a sense of what to look for and how to react.

*Comms & Cans*—The guides communicate with each other over walkie-talkies (“cans” in stage management parlance) as they each take different routes across a given park. In my experience guides were evenly split between Black and white Africans, and they often spoke to one another in Indigenous languages and used Afrikaans, Tswana, or other local names for animals. They then share information with their passengers in English. In one instance in Pilanesberg, I heard guides speaking in Afrikaans over their radios about sighting a big male lion; then Jacques, my guide, turned in that direction and made a big and dramatic “reveal” of the animal to me. The guides stage-manage scenarios for visitors, who experience the thrill of reveals, dramatic narratives, the corporeal experience of being out “in the wild” encountering wildlife, and animal-cum-characters: “That’s the red-billed hornbill—Zazu from that movie *The Lion King*,” said my Botswanan guide Baysimane.

*Suspense & Action*—Hunting and walking safaris require stamina and attentiveness. They involve suspense and mystery as guides and guests scour the landscape for animals' shapes, scat, tracks, or physical presence. Their conventions include the search or hunt, the money shot (through rifle or camera), and lots of disappointment. Much of safari involves sitting and waiting, driving or walking in circles seeking game, and *not seeing* animals

or action. One could say safari is actually about killing time. My Pilanesberg guide told me elephants are “entertaining” whereas lions just sleep all day. “Elephants show you something,” he says. In other words, they perform. Animals going through their everyday motions are mostly static and uninteresting to watch. No one is keen to see skin twitching away flies for hours on end, or animals sleeping under a tiny piece of shade. Walking safaris, I learned, are a lot of hot, sweaty slugging through the bush with no sign of animals except their scat. When animals are there, the space comes alive. Passive landscape is activated by fauna. Animals animate.

*Protagonists & Antagonists*—Safaris rely on action and dynamism for their audience appeal, on animals *performing* action rather than simply *being* animals. Tourist expectations are groomed by media, from *National Geographic* specials to YouTube videos, that emphasize animals in action. The ultimate sought-after action is, of course, a chase, hunt, and kill: watching two cheetahs stalk a herd of zebras and take one down; following lionesses as they hunt; observing hyenas in nocturnal action. These scenarios, which very often end in failure, fit nicely into a familiar dramatic narrative structure that pits antagonists against protagonists and builds suspensefully toward a climax. They are scenarios of hunter and hunted, life and death, where we watch wild animals be animals. Watching safari tourists observe these action sequences, I noted how often animals were cast into roles of savage hunter or helpless victim prey, glossing a natural phenomenon with anthropomorphized value judgments. The popularity of the 2004 YouTube video “Battle at Kruger,”<sup>33</sup> watched over 81 million times, is a testament to the appeal of watching nature play out the primal life and death scripts of hunter versus hunted. In the video, a pride of lions loses a protracted battle against a herd of fierce buffalo, reversing the dominance narrative of hunter defeating prey. Perhaps this video appeals to a global audience wishing to see the underdog win, as many comments on the video suggest: @sharpcookiellc: “strength in numbers. learn humans. learn.”; @blacksuperman9891: “That buffalo was well connected. I wish my squad was that deep”; @JewandGreek: “Lions be all gangsta til one of em goes flyin thru the air.” Some viewers even read an anti-imperial narrative into the scenario, with the buffalo herd’s collective solidarity standing up against the imperial lions: @faristasairuv5143: “The moral of this story is that when you all work together as one you and your people can defeat vastly more powerful enemies and get your children back.”

*Curtain call*—After a day of seeking action, the evening drive stops for sundowners (sunset cocktails) at a gorgeous location particularly good for a

photo opportunity. Africa rarely disappoints on delivering that fantasy sunset shot; a setting made even more fabulous should a giraffe silhouette the horizon. This carefully curated act of hospitality, which includes a beverage service tailored to individual guest preferences, dramaturgically frames the game drive in a moment of exquisite beauty, capturing fantasy and affective reality in a souvenir photograph. The safari day is thus framed, like Greek drama, within the bookends of sunrise and sunset. The ritual of shared libations at sunset also creates a spirit of community, as does sitting around the evening fire listening to the bush sounds and sharing stories, and photographs, of the day's adventures.

## Star Performers

Safaris play on an imaginary of Africa as a vast natural wonderland populated with animal performers, herds of ruminating ungulates, giraffes silhouetted against the massive setting sun. Animals are the main attraction, what Claire Molloy calls "fetishized objects of the tourist experience,"<sup>34</sup> star performers without which the affective experience falls flat. Imagined through an anthropomorphic lens, they are given human qualities, framed through dramatic scenarios, and expected to perform dynamically (in contrast to their default passivity). In hunting safaris animals are even expected to charge or attack, and hunters are expected to give fair chase. And after the hunt, animal bodies become trophies, souvenirs of a dramatic experience in a far-off place. These trophies, as Jennifer Parker-Starbuck posits, "remain"; they continue to enact their absent presence.<sup>35</sup>

Una Chaudhuri questions our orientation toward animals, urging us to "escape the sentimental and anthropocentric traditions that have stunted human-animal relations for so long," and to replace them with "a genuine curiosity about how the other animals experience the world that we humans are increasingly shaping and defining for them."<sup>36</sup> However, the case of Cecil the lion illustrates our human propensity for anthropomorphizing animals for emotional effect.

In July 2015 Walter Palmer, a dentist from Minnesota, shot a lion outside Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe. Because the lion was collared and known to researchers from the University of Oxford's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit as "Cecil" (named after colonial era mining magnate Cecil Rhodes), the hunt garnered international media attention and impassioned

public outcry.<sup>37</sup> It became what Steven Carpenter and David M. Konisky call a “focusing event,” bringing the wider context of the controversial trophy hunting industry to light. Cecil’s death brought about new regulations on trophy imports through the US Fish & Wildlife Service; lions were added to the endangered species list, and several airlines banned the transport of animal trophies. While this individual animal was just one of the approximately 42 lions hunted in Zimbabwe each year, what made him unique was he had a name, an individual identity and backstory—Cecil had a character arc.

Upon returning to the United States, Palmer’s dental practice was graffitied and his home spray-painted with the words “Lion Killer.” He had to go into hiding after receiving multiple death threats. The Palmer backlash signaled a shift in US public attitudes toward trophy hunting, which had been developing since the early 2000s. The hunt became a lightning rod for conservationists and animal rights activists, who had worked for years to tighten restrictions around hunting. It rallied public support and outrage from celebrities such as Jimmy Kimmel, whose teary monologue on his late-night show spurred much of the outcry. Conservation scholars engaged in public debate around trophy hunting; Benjamin Ghasemi found that “public value orientations and attitudes have gradually turned against domination and mastery views over wildlife to more mutualistic and animal-welfarist ones.”<sup>38</sup>

The events raised vital questions about the future of safari, as well as the Global North’s impact on Africa. Though the intensity of public outcry and activism over Cecil’s killing suggests a clear moral imperative surrounding safari’s most gruesome social costs, the situation is complicated by the vast geopolitical inequities on which tourism economies are built. African wildlife ranchers rely predominantly on European and American tourists’ hunting dollars<sup>39</sup> to maintain their animal populations, keep them healthy, and provide employment to their local communities. Hunting generates income that contributes to wildlife conservation and local communities via taxes, licensing fees, and ancillary safari costs. In South Africa alone between 2000–2016, trophy hunting from approximately 18,000 international hunters brought in ZAR 1.96 billion and employed almost 70,000 full time employees.<sup>40</sup> Across Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zambia hunting revenue has benefited community drinking water supplies, road construction, emergency transport, medical clinics, and schools. According to Catherine Semcer of the Property and Environment Research Center (PERC), “hunting enables African nations to practice conservation at landscape scales while [also] improving the lives and livelihoods of rural and Indigenous peoples in a way

that reduces dependence on foreign aid and philanthropy.”<sup>41</sup> The potential to grant Africans the agency to earn their own livelihoods and solve their own problems is one of the strongest arguments in favor of maintaining hunting as a transnational practice.

## Africa Performed, Exploited, Saved, Conserved

Africa seems forever caught between exploitation and salvation. Keim traces the historic framing of the African continent as a “primitive place, full of trouble and wild animals, and in need of our help.”<sup>42</sup> Europeans have imagined Africa as there/theirs for the taking, a treasure trove of natural resources to exploit and plunder. For Keim, Africa is imagined as simultaneously teeming jungle and ideal Eden; “tourist Africa isn’t the real Africa . . . it is carefully managed, commercialized, and exoticized.”<sup>43</sup> Safari aestheticizes difference in racial, geographic, and species registers. It performs a contemporary extension of the colonial mindset, even as it plays a vital role in African economies, ecosystems, and livelihoods.

Around the campfire in Pilanesberg one evening, the serving staff burst into song, dancing to the beat of drums. The responses I witnessed from guests at the outdoor tables were enthusiastic and ecstatic, as the performance fulfilled their illusions of Africa. Although the Indigenous Africans’ performance was joyous and self-motivated, it was circumscribed by a safari frame steeped in imperialist nostalgia, as well as by the financial necessity to conform to, and perform for, tourist desires. During my research in 2017, I witnessed tourist behavior that ranged from clichéd, cringeworthy Europeans posing with African children for their Instagram feeds to genuine and respectful interactions. One instance stands out: in a hunting camp of predominantly men, I was surprised and deeply moved to see an American father teaching his son the ethics of hunting, and how to respectfully take an animal’s life. He movingly spoke to me about his motivation for hunting in Africa: “Yes, we came here to hunt, but I also want my boy to understand other cultures, to meet local guides and trackers. I want him to know that the world is bigger than Louisiana. I want him to learn to be humble and kind. To be a *good man*.” The multiple truths of his response are an example of the dazzle of narratives around safari.

In the battle for hearts, minds, and dollars, both hunting advocates *and* conservationists leverage emotional or logical pleas to convince audiences

of the best path for Africa's future. This tense global debate reveals power dynamics between the Global North and Global South. What is best for Africa? Whose narrative wins? A 2021 op-ed in *The Hill* urged: "Westerners must not continue to externally impose their own ideals upon Africans, such as pushing trophy hunting bans and restrictions, where local communities warn they are directly undermining both successful conservation and human rights."<sup>44</sup> It cited a 2020 open letter from wildlife industry representatives in Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe written to a number of Western celebrities advocating for hunting bans in the wake of Cecil the lion's death. "As representatives of millions of rural Africans, the majority of whom live below the poverty line," they wrote, "stop undermining our globally recognised conservation efforts and our basic human right to sustainably use the natural resources on which our communities' livelihoods depend."<sup>45</sup>

Torn between competing interests and embedded in the Global North's colonial history vis-à-vis the Global South, safari is a particularly fraught form of tourism. In closing, I return to the question of what it means to be an ethical safari traveler. It means visitors engaging Africa with a generosity of spirit and a deep respect for local practices, rather than assuming Africa needs saving or that they know what is best for the communities they visit. It means practicing ways of encounter that are respectful and based on mutuality and intercultural exchange. To be certain, such exchange continues to involve the circulation and performance of mythologies that feed a fantasy and nostalgia about the idea of Africa; so, perhaps, when visitors sit around campfires listening to lions in the darkness, sipping cocktails served with a smile by an attentive hospitality worker, they might ponder their role in this performance. How do mythologies enmeshed in the affective experience of safari play out against the backdrop of historical imaginings about Africa? What does our longing for proximity to the natural world say about the nature of our lived experiences elsewhere? Who do we cast as protagonists and antagonists in our safari stories? And, as the sun lowers its curtain over the night sky, what role does our visitation play in the lives of the animals and people who call Africa home?<sup>46</sup>

## Notes

1. Data from India and US-based market research firm Grand View Research, <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/safari-tourism-market-report>

2. Green hunting involves tranquilizer dart guns and release of the animal alive, usually under the supervision of a veterinarian. It is an alternative to lethal forms of hunting.

3. A. V. Seaton, in "Guided by the dark: From thanatopsis to thanatourism," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 2, no. 4 (1996): 234–244, defined thanatourism as: "travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent death" (cited in Duncan Light, "Progress in dark tourism and thanatourism research: An uneasy relationship with heritage tourism," *Tourism Management* (2017): 278).

4. Field research at Disney's Animal Kingdom (DAK) in Orlando, FL, Pilanesberg and Kruger National Park in South Africa, and Chobe and the Okavango Delta in Botswana in May 2017 was sponsored by a Healey Faculty Research Grant from the University of Massachusetts.

5. William Cronon traces the evolution of the American notion of wilderness, from its eighteenth- and nineteenth- century meaning as "the antithesis of all that is orderly and good" to more recent constructions as "Eden itself" (9). Wilderness in his estimation is "quite profoundly a human creation," (7) a narrative and a fantasy of what the natural world means to human beings. ("The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (1996): 7–28.)

6. Jonathan S. Adams and Thomas O. McShane. *The Myth of Wild Africa: Conservation Without Illusion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 6.

7. Bartle Bull, *Safari: A Chronicle of Adventure* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 14. Bull chronicles safari's history, beginning with the first documented safari in 1836, when Cornwallis Harris walked across the Transvaal with his double-barreled rifle and ox-wagon in search of the hunter's Garden of Eden.

8. See Cory Gross, "Imperialist Adventure Literature," <https://silentmoviemonsters.tripod.com/TheLostWorld/LWIMPAD.html>

9. Safari has been staged in films like *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, based on a 1936 Ernest Hemingway story (1952, Gregory Peck and Ava Gardner, Kenya); *Hatari* (1962, John Wayne, Tanzania); *The Naked Prey* (1966, Cornel Wilde, South Africa); and *Out of Africa* (1985, Robert Redford and Meryl Streep, Kenya), to name only a few.

10. "From Hegel's perspective, Africa is said to be unhistorical; undeveloped spirit—still involved in the conditions of mere nature; devoid of morality, religions and political constitution." Omotade Adegbindin, "Critical Notes on Hegel's Treatment of Africa," *Ogirisi: A New Journal of African Studies* 11 (2015).

11. Megan Lewis, *Performing Whiteness in the Postcolony* (Des Moines: University of Iowa Press, 2016).

12. Mary Battiata, "Out of Africa: The Swirl of Reminiscence," *The Washington Post*, 24 December 1985.

13. Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), 22.

14. Bartle Bull's chapter "Haggard, Hemingway and Hollywood" in *Safari* (New York: Penguin, 1992), 263–290.

15. Sylvie Chalaye, "Colonial Imaginary: fantasies and nostalgia," *Le revue d'Africultures* 43 (2006).

16. Brian Herne, *White Hunters: The Golden Age of African Safaris* (New York: Macmillan, 1999).

17. Shelly R. Scott, "Conserving, Consuming, and Improving on Nature at Disney's Animal Kingdom," *Theatre Topics* 17, no. 2 (2007): 111–127.
18. At Busch Gardens, in Tampa Florida, tourists can "trek through an abandoned fishing village on the Edge of Africa" and "encounter exotic African animals in naturalistic habitats" (www.buschgardens.com).
19. Scott (2007), 120.
20. Lewis. Safari field notes. (2017).
21. Scott Magelssen, *Simming: Participatory Performance and the Making of Meaning* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014).
22. Scott (2007), 120. The poaching element has subsequently been removed from this attraction.
23. Lewis. Safari field notes. (March 23, 2017).
24. Machaba Safaris (www.machabasafaris.com)
25. Curtis A. Keim, *Mistaking Africa: Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 129.
26. Adam Cruise "SATSA's Guidelines for Captive Wildlife Interactions for Tourists Using its Tour Operators," (January 27, 2020), <https://www.satsa.com/sites/default/files/2023-10/SATSA%20Captive%20Wildlife%20Guide.pdf>
27. Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," 7.
28. Robin Derricourt, *Inventing Africa: History, Archaeology and Ideas* (New York: Pluto Press, 2011), 145.
29. Jane Carruthers, "Conservation and Wildlife Management in South African National Parks 1930s–1960s," *Journal of the History of Biology* 41, no. 2, (2008): 203–236.
30. World Travel and Tourism Council (<http://www.statssa.gov.za>)
31. Derricourt, 145.
32. Keim, 142.
33. Battle at Kruger, YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LU8DDYz68kM>
34. Claire Molloy, *Popular Media and Animals* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 71.
35. Lourdes Orozco and Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, eds. *Performing Animality: Animals in Performance Practices*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 11.
36. Una Chaudhuri, "Animals in War, Animals on War: New Perspectives from a Theater of Species," *Society & Animals* 21 (2013): 108.
37. According to Steven Carpenter and David M. Konisky, between July and September of 2015, Cecil the Lion generated "a total of 94,631 distinct editorial news items and 695,983 distinct social media posts across 125 languages," ("The killing of Cecil the Lion as an impetus for policy change"), *Oryx* 53, no. 4 (2019): 699.
38. Benjamin Ghasemi, "Trophy hunting and conservation: Do the major ethical theories converge in opposition to trophy hunting?" *People and Nature* 3, no. 1 (2021): 77–87.
39. US tourists make up 60% of the safari market, <https://www.go2africa.com/african-travel-blog/annual-african-safari-travel-report-2023>
40. William A. Taylor, Peter Lindsey, and Harriet T. Davies-Mostert. An assessment of the economic, social and conservation value of the wildlife ranching industry and its potential to support the green economy in South Africa. *The Endangered Wildlife Trust*, Johannesburg, 2015.

41. Catherine Semcer, "The Role of Hunting in Conserving African Wildlife: Catherine Semcer's testimony before the U.S. House Natural Resources Committee on the 'CECIL Act,'" (2019), <https://www.perc.org/2019/07/18/the-role-of-hunting-in-conserving-african-wildlife>

42. Keim, 5.

43. Keim, 70.

44. Amy Dickman, Brian Child, Adam Hart, and Catherine Semcer, "Misinformation about trophy hunting is wrong. Dead wrong," *The Hill*, 16 February 2021. <https://www.the-week.co.uk/101090/trophy-hunting-the-arguments-for-and-against>

45. Resource Africa, "Open Letter: Celebrity campaigns undermine successful conservation and human rights," 14 July 2020. <https://www.resourceafrica.net/open-letter-celebrity-campaigns-undermine-successful-conservation-and-human-rights/>

46. Special thanks to the ASTR Working Session on Performing Animality led by Jen Parker-Starbuck and Kim Marra and my deepest appreciation to Dr. Alex Lewis, South African wildlife veterinarian and conservation expert.

## CHAPTER 11

# Dinosaur Encounters

### *Settler Colonialism and Planetary Time in South Dakota's Black Hills*

Scott Magelssen

Time is out of joint in the opening moments of Steven Spielberg's 1993 film *Jurassic Park*, his blockbuster adaptation of Michael Crichton's bestselling novel. After the movie's title appears in its now iconic primitivist, African-safari-inspired lettering, the audience is immersed into an exotic and threatening locale in which state-of-the-art technology is pitted against the violent forces of nature. As the scene unfolds, tropical foliage rustles and electric cattle prods flash like lightning in the thickening mist as a crew of local workers attempts to transfer a dangerous dinosaur from its holding pen into its paddock. Primal growls share the soundscape with the ominous minor key notes of John Williams's score as the workers display fear and apprehension in the face of their unnatural task. A white game warden oversees the operation, looking like a colonial expedition leader in his khaki hunting vest and Australian bush hat. The animal transfer, of course, goes awry. The technology fails to keep the untamed dinosaur in check. The beast (mostly unseen except for a shot of a menacing reptilian eye through an aperture in the holding pen) violently kills a nameless Black worker before the crew can regain control, despite the game warden's noble attempts to save him.

The scene is, to paraphrase Michel de Certeau, an "inaugural" moment of encounter between civilization and untamed nature.<sup>1</sup> De Certeau was describing Theodor Galle's engraving (after a drawing by Jan van der Straet) of Amerigo Vespucci, bearing the European "weapons of meaning," discovering primitive exotic America (fig. 11.1).<sup>2</sup> Time and space have likewise been breached in *Jurassic Park*. Previously inviolable worlds have been brought



Figure 11.1. Engraving by Theodor Galle depicting Amerigo Vespucci “discovering” America (c. 1580).

together, for good or for ill, through science and entrepreneurship. In this case, dinosaurs and humans—up to now separated by eons, but brought together in the shared space of the eponymous tourist attraction on “Isla Nubar” (a fictional island 120 miles off the coast of Costa Rica)—make for a nightmarish yet thrilling juxtaposition. Before the film’s end, several more victims will be killed by the genetically resurrected theme park dinosaurs, including the game warden. *Jurassic Park*’s protagonists end up being a handful of white scientists and two precocious white children, who make it to the end even as the technology fails and they are left solely to their wits to evade the savage monsters.

“The dinosaur,” writes Svetlana Boym in her essay interrogating *Jurassic Park* and American nostalgia, “is America’s unicorn, the mythical animal of Nature’s Nation.” For Boym, *Jurassic Park* is the latest popular culture production to give American audiences a “technopastoral” that scientifically resurrects legendary creatures to soothe and reassure them with their national

mythology and their role on the global stage: “While the Renaissance in Europe occupied itself with unearthing its classical heritage, America’s renaissance at the end of the nineteenth century (and thus the beginning of American global prominence) needed a prehistoric heritage—to outdo Europe in scale and age.”<sup>3</sup> And yet, as Boym argues, the twin of this promethean endeavor to push the limits of science and technology in search of progress is the sublime horror of coming face-to-face with Americans’ most irrational fears.

To be sure, the film, and the affective rapture in which it holds audiences, capitalizes not only on Spielberg’s cinematic techniques but also the recognizable tropes of the precarious primal wilderness filled with exotic monsters going back cinematically to filmic environments like *The Lost World* (1925) and *King Kong* (1933), and drawing on colonialist popular culture conceptions of the jungles of Africa, South America, and the Pacific. The dark, misty jungle, the safari vest and bush hat, and the African-inspired opening title comprise these tropes, as does the expendable Black laborer falling victim to nature, red in tooth and claw, in the service of the benevolent white overseer. The movie’s tourist park, in fact, sports an African safari-inspired aesthetic and branding, and a pastiche of primitive African motifs, elephant guns, and tiki torches, thematically linking dinosaurs with exciting uncivilized non-white spaces available to the white leisure class in the modern world. The enterprise capitalizes on what Mary Louise Pratt calls the “Eurocentered planetary consciousness,” a modernist drive to encounter the exotic worlds to the west, the south, and the east of Europe, and to rein in, organize, and classify their natural phenomena.<sup>4</sup>

I first saw *Jurassic Park* at a second-run discount movie theater in Rapid City, South Dakota, in the summer of 1994 when I worked as a counselor at a sleepaway camp outside of Custer State Park in the Black Hills. Though I didn’t know it at the time, the venue was fitting. Rapid City was also the site of an inaugural moment of encounter when in 1937 the city’s Dinosaur Park opened to the public atop an ancient sandstone bluff rising 300 feet above the city. Presiding over the park were five immense life-sized dinosaurs, bristling with horns, spikes, and dagger-like teeth. Sculpted from concrete and supported by skeletons of black iron pipe, the dinosaurs were based on some of the most exciting and breathtaking species from the Late Jurassic and Cretaceous periods recently excavated from the American West, including a *Triceratops*, *Apatosaurus* (*Brontosaurus*), *Stegosaurus*, and, most sensational of all, a *Tyrannosaurus rex*. Dinosaur Park welcomed visitors to an encounter with these life-sized prehistoric creatures unlike anything available outside

a small handful of museum exhibits on the East Coast, in Chicago, or, if one was particularly lucky, during a visit to a world's fair. Depictions of dinosaurs in general were not nearly as widely available as they are today. Dinosaur books and toys were not popular until the second half of the century,<sup>5</sup> and popular culture representations like those in the stop-motion action scenes of *King Kong* (1933) and *The Lost World* (1925) could only be seen when shown in cinemas. Beholding a full-scale dinosaur representation would have been an experience to remember, a face-to-face encounter with an Other from an earlier time that resisted comprehension. When the tourists first beheld the towering reconstructions of the very beasts that roamed the Black Hills in the Mesozoic era, they weren't just able to imagine a thrilling encounter with real versions of the prehistoric monsters like never before. They reperformed a scenario wrapped up in the same sensational narratives of white precarity on which *Jurassic Park* would capitalize sixty years later—a scenario that had fueled fascination with the American West since the beginning of American colonial settlers' violent relationship with it—and the Indigenous peoples who called it home.

This essay argues that the Rapid City dinosaurs (now listed in the National Register of Historic Places, though their once imposing teeth and claws have been lost to time and souvenir hunters) are a central node in the network of tourist industry performance that capitalizes on the frontier mythology of the American West as a thrilling and dangerous site of precarity—and that thereby they can be seen as performative analogues to representations of Indigenous peoples of North America, fellow denizens of the “past” that similarly offered tropes of exoticism and threat that seduced the white American tourist consumer. To make this case, I'll offer a brief account of Dinosaur Park's conception and construction within a larger narrative of Rapid City's rise, first as a gold-rush destination and subsequently a touristic Frontierland hub in the Black Hills—which themselves continually reperform the mystique of the American West from outlaw shootouts to Custer's Last Stand. Dinosaurs, like Frontier Indians, offered an exotic foil against which to play out tourists' settler colonial fantasies of encounter—they were simultaneously threatening and inspiring.

My essay serves as an entry point to a larger meditation on themes of visitation explored in this collection, namely, the touristic desire for encounters with the different and exotic, but through narratives that reassure tourists of their temporal and spatial position in the global hierarchy. Rapid City's Dinosaur Park emerged within the tourism and leisure industry boom dis-

cussed by foundational tourism scholars like Dean MacCannell, John Urry and Jonas Larsen, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, and David Lowenthal.<sup>6</sup> The boom was precipitated by the rise of the middle class and the unprecedented access to travel that came first with railroads, and then mass production of the automobile and the codification of the US Highway system. The breathtaking speed with which roadside attractions and conveniences emerged to meet this new audience and construct for them the touristic encounters they demanded required that they draw upon an existing repertoire of technologies and tropes afforded by the popular entertainment forms that had their roots in the second half of the nineteenth century, such as world's fairs and amusement parks, museological exhibitions, wild west shows and traveling panoramas, stage melodramas, blackface minstrelsy, and eventually radio and film. A great number of these entertainment forms, of course, reified discourses of racism, white supremacy, eugenics and social Darwinism, and other pseudo-scientific theories that sought to advance the idea of the superiority of certain white-skinned humans.<sup>7</sup> Tourism's representational practices in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were bound up from the start with white racial anxieties. They were part of a larger storytelling project about humans and society directed by the structural conventions of what Joe R. Feagin calls the "white racial frame," in which white tourists are always already protagonists in scenarios of encounter that play out through their visitations.<sup>8</sup>

The white racial frame, writes Feagin, "for centuries functioned as a broad worldview, one essential to the routine legitimation, scripting, and maintenance of systemic racism in the United States."<sup>9</sup> A broad and persisting set of stereotypes, conceptual ideologies, imagery, and racialized reactions and emotions embedded in American minds and institutions, the white racial frame situates American whites as the heroes of a central story emphasizing superiority, virtue, moral action, and hard work amid the continual threat from the forces of nature and untamed human and non-human animals.<sup>10</sup> Forged in the Enlightenment's racialized discourses, the white racial frame took on new valences in the era of westward expansion and white settler colonialism with circulating meaning-making tropes of brave pioneers "winning the West" in the larger overarching myth of Manifest Destiny. "In that narrative," Feagin writes, "white 'settlers' again fought the battles against 'savage Indians,' with the white heroes being rewarded with land and supposedly villainous Indigenous peoples being killed off or isolated on reservations."<sup>11</sup> Both the landscape and its Indigenous occupants were scripted into an insidious world view described by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva as the "white habitus,"

in which the earth's wildernesses are there to be either exploited or benevolently preserved.<sup>12</sup> This is echoed by ecocritical performance scholar Theresa J. May, who coins the term "eco-minstrelsy" to describe the projection of human power, privilege, and ideology upon the so-called natural world that assures us that we are "tame, civilized, and worthy of the biblical role of master."<sup>13</sup> As these Western stories of white settlers prospering against untamed Indians continued to be disseminated in literature and visual culture into the twentieth century, the mythologies of white protagonism informed white Americans' visions of themselves, and cemented a worldview characterized by threats to white safety and purity with a deep affective charge.

The tourism industry saw in staged dinosaur encounters an ideal venue for profiting off the reflex to reinscribe these mythologies of white protagonism and precarity. As I've written about elsewhere, the idea of extinct animals roaming a very different earth millions upon millions of years ago was such an abstract notion for visitors that natural history museum curators reached for these available tropes to make this "deep time" more familiar and assimilable as part of a larger educational effort. This included the articulation of fossilized skeletons in dynamically posed tableaux accompanied with painted scenery that depicted the Mesozoic wilderness very much like the rugged and dangerous Badlands and Black Hills of the American Western Frontier.<sup>14</sup> In other cases, the tried-and-true scenarios of titillating threats to the safety and purity of white protagonists in the wilderness were gambits by a burgeoning tourism industry to siphon the flow of travelers and their dollars to roadside attractions popping up along the vast thoroughfares of the American West. Rapid City's Dinosaur Park was born out of precisely this gambit: The dinosaur sculptures staged for visitors a scenario of encounter that, in the manner of Pratt's "Eurocentered planetary consciousness," packaged the tropes of the American frontier and white racial anxiety into an assimilable experience that both thrilled and reassured. Dinosaur Park, like *Jurassic Park* in Boym's analysis, soothed over any "disquieting ambivalence and paradoxical dialectic of past, present and future." In so doing, it simultaneously provided both "a total restoration of extinct creatures and conflict resolution."<sup>15</sup>

## Rapid City and the Staging of the American Frontier

Both the Black Hills of South Dakota, and its gateway Rapid City, are within the ancestral and unceded land of the Lakota Sioux people. The US government signed the Fort Laramie treaty with the Sioux (Lakota, Dakota) and the

Arapaho nations in 1868, saying that the Black Hills were to remain solely in Lakota possession, and that no white man would henceforth set foot therein. For the first several years after the 1868 treaty, the US Army helped keep white settlers out. The government's perception of the region to that point was in line with what Vittoria di Palma describes as a modern framing of the "wasteland" as a "threatening, challenging, and perilous place," unfit for and useless to non-Indians.<sup>16</sup> But when the Custer Expedition of 1874 not only violated the agreement and encroached into the Black Hills but also discovered gold there, the Lakota's sovereign claim was dissolved through military force. The Army gave up on staunching the flow of white prospectors into the territory and allowed frontier settlers to move in and establish towns. The United States eventually used its might to starve out and forcibly sequester the Lakota into a non-traditional agrarian life on reservation land.<sup>17</sup>

The Black Hills gold rush saw a spike in the region's notoriety, with tales from rough-and-tumble boom towns like Deadwood populated by characters like Wild Bill Hickok, Calamity Jane, and the Black Hills Bandits, and all their thrilling Wild West escapades: saloon gambling, shootouts, and train and stagecoach robberies. As was also the case with Missouri's Silver Dollar City and Marfa, Texas in Joanna Dee Das and Weston Twardowski's respective contributions to this volume, the Black Hills region was a frontier locale that functioned as "both a physical and mental space beyond the reach of state authority." Likewise, it was marked with vigilantism and a mythos of frontier justice "deeply connected to racial violence." Throughout those decades, the region was punctuated by violent skirmishes between Native Lakota and whites, and these conflicts were set against a larger backdrop of the Indian Wars of the American West—perhaps the most notorious being Custer's overwhelming defeat by combined forces of Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapaho tribes at Little Big Horn in the Great Sioux War of 1876.<sup>18</sup> The region's sensational Wild West reputation among whites as a land of get-rich-quick opportunity plagued with dangerous savages had been circulating for several decades already, as evidenced by (among other artifacts) the so-called Thoen Stone, a slab of sandstone allegedly detailing the fate of an 1834 band of white prospectors who were slowly killed off one-by-one by menacing Indians.<sup>19</sup> The authenticity of the Thoen Stone hasn't been proven, but it boosted the narrative of white prospectors laying claim to Black Hills gold well before 1874, and to the sensational narrative of the Hills being a site of white precarity worthy of treatment in dime novels and Wild West arena spectacles.

The treasures buried in the landscape of what are now the Dakotas, Montana, Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming included more than just gold. Soon unearthed fossils of prehistoric animals would dramatically shift the field of paleontology. Up to that point, the recently named category of *dinosauria* comprised Iguanodons and Megalosaurus (represented as rhinoceros-like, hunch-shouldered quadrupeds in Waterhouse Hawkins's Crystal Palace Park sculptures), or the gangly, lizard-like Hadrosaurs and Laelaps discovered in and around New Jersey. The fossils discovered in the American West, however, suggested enormous and frightening paleontological superstars larger, more ferocious, and more spectacular than ever before seen on the world stage. The discoveries, beginning in 1877, writes David K. Randall, "opened a new front" in the competitive "Bone Wars" between fossil hunters like Othniel Charles Marsh and Edward Drinker Cope, "taking the battlefield away from the marshes of the East Coast and into the canyons and cliffs carving the western half of the country"—which was accessible now via the Transcontinental Railroad. "There, everything seemed greater," writes Randall: "fossils which suggested dinosaurs so big that they stretched imagination; the starkness of the landscape; and the prize of finding what very well could be the largest animal that ever walked on earth."<sup>20</sup>

As white American settlers poured into the Black Hills in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, one of the US's most audacious acts was to carve the likenesses of four white American presidents into one of the most sacred rock formations of the Lakota territory. Known among non-Natives as Mount Rushmore, it is widely viewed among the Lakota as a desecration of the Black Hills and a culmination of the catastrophe initiated with the first waves of westward expansion and settler colonialism. Conceived ostensibly as a monument to American ingenuity and accomplishment, but more importantly as a tourist draw, the Mount Rushmore project (1927–1941) was seen by stakeholders throughout the entire American West as a major economic driver, especially during the Great Depression. In Di Palma's conception, national monument tourism was seen as the last stage in the improvement, indeed "redemption," of the American frontier's "wastelands"<sup>21</sup>—the first stages, of course, being the extractive industries first harvesting the region's gold and fossil deposits. Mount Rushmore and the tourism industry it came to power thus served as the initial impetus for the Rapid City dinosaur attraction.

The idea for Dinosaur Park is credited to the Rapid City Chamber of Commerce in 1935. The Chamber was already seeking ways to attract visitors

to the city and its stores, hotels, and restaurants on their way to view construction underway at Mount Rushmore, about twenty miles to the southwest. The Chamber agreed on the plan for a dinosaur-themed attraction atop the city's central sandstone bluff, known among locals by the grim nickname of Hangman's Hill (after an 1877 Western-style extrajudicial mob lynching of alleged horse thieves). They secured funding from the US government through the Works Progress Administration (Project #960) and commissioned local sculptor Emmet Aloysius Sullivan to design and oversee construction of the dinosaur sculptures by a WPA crew and local workmen. "Five giants of a past age, reproduced in steel and concrete on the ground they once trod," enthused a January 1937 *New York Times* piece, "will soon look down from Hangman's Hill [. . .] on some of the wonders of the present. They will constitute—in Dinosaur National Monument Park [*sic*—a companion attraction to the huge carvings of three presidents at Mount Rushmore in the Black Hills."<sup>22</sup>

Preliminary excavations began atop Hangman's Hill in March 1936. Construction was led by H. H. Babcock (Chief Engineer) and Walter Walking (WPA Engineer) under Sullivan's supervision.<sup>23</sup> The five initial dinosaurs were an 80-foot-long *Apatosaurus*, three-horned *Triceratops*, bony-plated and spiked-tailed *Stegosaurus*, ferocious meat-eater *T. rex*, and a duck-billed *Trachodon* (now *Edmontosaurus*).<sup>24</sup> The sculptures were constructed according to Sullivan's design. Concrete was layered over skeletons of two-inch black iron pipe. Body parts and appendages were fashioned from wire mesh and overlaid with more concrete, to which Sullivan added details like scales, based on fossil records. An amount of \$25,000 was budgeted for the project, and fifteen months for completion, including three months for painting the dinosaurs. The project was dedicated on June 1, 1937. Sullivan had initially painted the sculptures gray, but they were painted over with the now-familiar bright-green and white color scheme in the 1950s. The National Register of Historic Places inducted Rapid City Dinosaur Park in 1990.

Emmet Sullivan, routinely the central figure in origin stories about Dinosaur Park, has also acquired a somewhat sensational history, some of it by his own design. According to amateur historian and roadside dinosaur sculpture aficionado Emily M. Parris, Sullivan was an enthusiast of Native American history and culture. Originally from Montana, he relocated to Rapid City after serving in the first World War to "explore the possibility of a project to commemorate the Trail of Tears."<sup>25</sup> By some accounts, Sullivan had worked

as a cowboy when he lived in Montana before the War.<sup>26</sup> In an interview, Pat Roseland of the Minnilusa Historical Association and Troy Kilpatrick, Executive Director of the Journey Museum, told South Dakota Public Broadcasting's *In the Moment* host Lori Walsh that Sullivan was practicing law in Rapid City and had also built a reputation among the locals for his plaster busts of Indian chiefs and Indian princesses, "molded from life."<sup>27</sup> It was this work that caught the attention of the Rapid City Chamber of Commerce and led to his commission as dinosaur designer. Sullivan also claimed to have been on the work crew for Mount Rushmore and that he had cooperated with Rushmore creator Gutzon Borglum on the design of the presidents' faces, though no record of such involvement has ever been found.<sup>28</sup>

According to Black Hills historian Helen Rezzatto, Sullivan based the dinosaurs' physiology on the most accurate scientific theory of the day, and apparently fashioned the proportions according to five small plaster scale models provided by the American Museum of Natural History.<sup>29</sup> This, too, is a matter of debate; an alternate narrative about the five plaster models says that they were Sullivan's own prototypes that he brought to Washington, D.C., to help secure federal WPA funding for the project.<sup>30</sup> To me, the dinosaurs appear to be proportioned according to the demands of gravity and their heavy construction materials (iron pipe and concrete), more than an attempt to capture the science and aesthetics featured in the paleoart of the time.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, the dinosaurs' shapes and postures generally conformed to the prevailing paleontological theory of the day, which held that they were lumbering reptilians that dragged their tails on the ground.

Construction on the Dinosaur Park proceeded apace despite a dust-up between Sullivan and the WPA over the installation of the *Tyrannosaurus rex*'s dagger-like teeth, which involved Sullivan walking off the jobsite with the teeth in protest, temporarily halting the final weeks of construction.<sup>32</sup> Once an agreement was reached, Sullivan returned and the teeth were placed in the maw of the *T. rex* so that the park could be dedicated on schedule, sitting atop what would thenceforth be renamed "Dinosaur Hill." Sullivan was granted the concession attached to the site and ran the gift shack there for years afterward, selling to tourists not dinosaur memorabilia but his own plaster busts of Indian chiefs and princesses that had originally caught the Chamber of Commerce's eye, along with other Native American souvenirs and trinkets. Sullivan would go on to produce more concrete dinosaurs, all boasting his signature style, including those featured in the now-defunct

Dinosaur World park (formerly Land of Kong) in Beaver, Arkansas, and the famous 80-foot-long Wall Drug *Brontosaurus* in Wall, South Dakota, about an hour east of Rapid City.<sup>33</sup>

At age 79, Sullivan was commissioned to build the Christ of the Ozarks colossus in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, a towering seven-story Jesus statue that was the brainchild of Gerald L. K. Smith, the notorious publisher of the racist and anti-Semitic periodical *The Cross and the Flag*.<sup>34</sup> It is unclear whether Sullivan shared Smith's views on Jews, immigrants, and other perceived threats to white Christian purity and safety, but he certainly would have been aware of them. Sullivan had spent a lifetime exoticizing and capitalizing on Native American kitsch. He was, at the very least, a fellow traveler with Smith in the problematic discursive landscape of white racial politics: Sullivan was a Western artist-entrepreneur who capitalized on white Americans' nostalgia for and fascination with the Indigenous peoples of the frontier, selling the "chiefs" and "princesses" that he captured in his souvenir statuettes for sale at his concession stand. Whereas the restaging of Silver Dollar City as a tourist attraction in Das's essay substituted a whitewashed and family-friendly "ritualized containment" of violence for its history of anti-Black lynchings and "frontier justice," Sullivan's amenities at Dinosaur Park continued to link exoticizing and thrilling human racial narratives to visitors' encounters with his dinosaurs. These Indian archetypes added to the mystique of the Black Hills, which by the first decades of the twentieth century had become inundated with a potpourri of tourist kitsch, endlessly recycling noble savages, wild west shootouts, gold mining lore, Custer's Last Stand, and shops and roadside stands hawking Black Hills Gold and Native American-inspired pottery and turquoise jewelry.

## The Touristic Scenario of Encounter

I visited Dinosaur Park in May 2022. It was my first time in Rapid City since I worked in the Black Hills that summer back in 1994. Even thirty years prior, the dinosaurs were comical in appearance. That hadn't changed, but the concrete sculptures were much shabbier than I remembered (fig. 11.2).<sup>35</sup> The *T. rex*'s gaping mouth was just a gummy grin rather than a fierce baring of fangs, its teeth having been pilfered by tourists by the end of the 1940s ("Derpy," the adjective *Atlas Obscura* lovingly applies to the roadside dinosaurs' appearance, applies here).<sup>36</sup> Gone too were the *T. rex*'s foreclaws, its tiny arms merely



Figure 11.2. Rapid City Dinosaur Park in 2023. Tyrannosaurus rex now missing teeth and foreclaws. Image by the author.

ending in anticlimactic stumps. The *Stegosaurus* had undergone an appearance change as well. Its tail once ended in a display of spikes, but these had been removed (perhaps for safety reasons) and its replacement tail extended to an exaggerated length—a seeming act of overcompensation for the loss of its once wicked back end.

The dinosaurs are all wincingly out-of-date in the articulation of their bodies and posture. The *Trachodon* and *T. rex* stand upright with their long tails dragging behind them like kangaroos, far different from their horizontal, bird-like stance with tails aloft in contemporary paleoart and museum displays. The four-legged dinosaurs similarly drag their tails, their backs arching high, their sturdy legs in wide stances like giant plodding English Bulldogs.<sup>37</sup> The *Tyrannosaurus*'s measurements were fashioned with the now incorrect profile of wide hips and tiny ribcage (also found in the purple dinosaur host of *Barney & Friends* and Rex from *Toy Story*), rather than the barrel-shaped

trunk in contemporary *T. rex* depictions. The mid-century decision to repaint the sculptures with a comprehensive color scheme of bright green dorsal parts with white underbellies perhaps took a cue from modern lizards like geckos, but green dinosaurs look especially anachronistic after the “dinosaur renaissance” in paleoart beginning in the 1960s imagined a much more diverse and striking color palate onto the skins of prehistoric animals. Now, in 2022, the dinosaurs’ paint was flaking, sometimes completely bare in mangy patches.<sup>38</sup>

And yet, with a little imagination (and with the help of black-and-white photographs of the dinosaurs as they once looked from South Dakota State Historical Society Archives), one can conjecture what it may have been like to encounter these monsters in their heyday. Towering above the city atop the sandstone hill, they are visible for miles. Close up, their magnitude is even more impressive. The original gray-painted detailing gave the dinosaur bodies surprising depth and contour. The animals’ painted eyes are bright and alive in photographs from the 1930s. The spikes and bony back plates of *Stegosaurus* fade from dark at the base to light at the tips (fig. 11.3).

And, of course, the *T. rex*’s mouthful of long, pointed teeth and rampant foreclaws (each arm ended in three clawed fingers, contrary even to 1936 science that had established *T. rex* only had two) made him nothing less than, “ferocious.”<sup>39</sup> The dinosaurs’ postures could be described as noble: the duck-billed *Trachodon* rears up, seemingly scanning the landscape for predators. The *Brontosaurus* strides the crest of the hill like an immense proudly strutting swan. The *Tyrannosaurus* and *Triceratops* face off against one another, echoing the famous duel between these two Cretaceous rivals in Charles R. Knight’s 1928 mural for the Field Museum (Sullivan likely got his idea for this standoff from Knight’s painting).

Here, atop the sandstone bluff, moreover, the dinosaurs (along with their creators) could take full advantage of the meaning-making repertoire available from pop culture representations already familiar to tourists along their American-themed itinerary to Mount Rushmore. The scenario of civilization vs. untamed wilderness dependably elicited a thrilling cocktail of fear and delight, as evidenced by *King Kong*, *The Lost World*, and *Tarzan of the Apes*, as well as cowboy-and-Indian melodramas seen and heard in movies, serials, and radio shows like *The Lone Ranger* (first aired in 1933). Those scenarios played out in Dinosaur Park as tourists from civilization ventured into the untamed wilderness of the Black Hills where they could reperform “the American frontier myth of going West to a place ‘thin with population and thick with peril.’”<sup>40</sup>

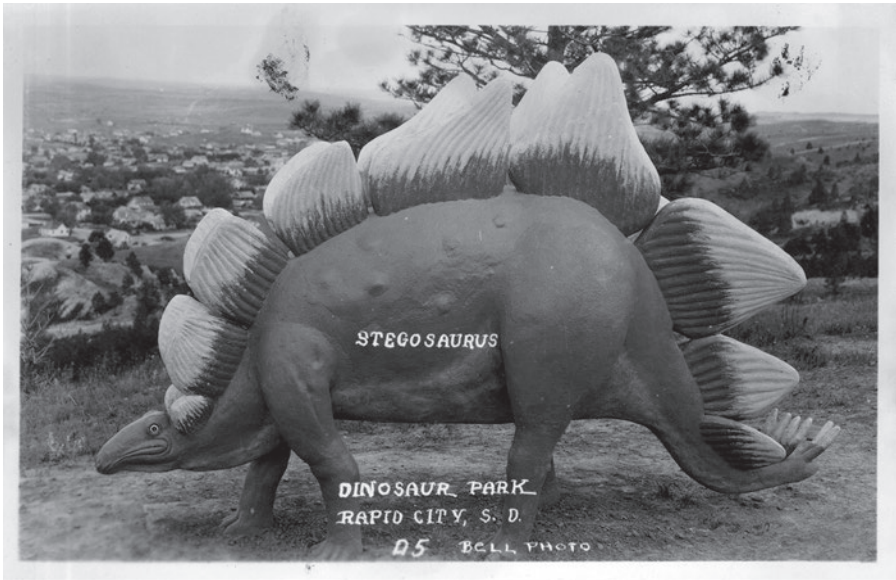


Figure 11.3. Stegosaurus at Rapid City Dinosaur Park. South Dakota State Historical Society, South Dakota Digital Archives (2015-01-22-303). Photo by Bert. F. Bell.

Dinosaurs, of course, never posed actual threats to human beings, white or otherwise, their last days on the planet separated from ours by sixty-five million years. But precisely because of this gap, dinosaurs are ciphers—inassimilable subjects from deep time that require performative acts of storytelling for humans to make cognitive sense of them. Political anthropologist Brian Noble argues that it's possible to go so far as to say that “dinosaurs are entailed entirely by human signification, that is, by human storytelling, imaginative construction, and nothing else—they are total, unmitigated fabrications.”<sup>41</sup> He draws our attention to the ways in which the sheer unknowability of what dinosaurs were actually like has required their fossil remains to be “materialized performatively” by those who have risen to meet the challenge in cultural productions ranging from educational exhibits to pop culture imaginings in media and the toy industry, a network he calls the “specimen-spectacle complex.”<sup>42</sup>

For visual culture scholar W. J. T. Mitchell, similarly, the dinosaur is the result of an “image/text” invented by scientists and artists. “The ‘real’ dinosaur is available only in its traces or remains (bones, footprints, feces), what a semiologist would call ‘indices,’ signs of cause and effect or ‘existential con-

nection,' and in its imaginative restorations," Mitchell writes. "When we see a dinosaur, then, we are seeing a constructed image with an assigned name and description. We never see the 'real' dinosaur, but only an artifact, a visual-verbal-tactile construction based on its remains and an array of prototypes we use to make sense of those remains."<sup>43</sup> To construct these images, scientists draw on a repertoire of available images to flesh them out. "This is true of every image, of course," Mitchell reminds us, "All seeing involves metaphor, or 'seeing as,' and so does all image making. But it is even more emphatically the case with the dinosaur, whose traces are so fragmentary and minimal."<sup>44</sup> The practically blank slate presented by dinosaur fossils in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries afforded a wide flexibility in the metaphors that could be employed for such meaning making, and, as cultural historian Lukas Rieppel puts it, "[t]he mystery of what life may have been like during the depths of time allowed people to project their fears and anxieties, as well as their hopes and fantasies, onto these alien creatures."<sup>45</sup>

Here, at the "gateway" to the Black Hills, no anxiety was perhaps as pernicious, no fantasy as seductive, as the sensational scenario of white precarity on the ragged edge of civilization. Tourists at Rapid City Dinosaur Park could imagine themselves into a zone of rupture, a breach of time and space like the opening scene of *Jurassic Park* would capture decades later. Hangman's Hill became at once Frontier and Mesozoic. Adventurers from the civilized world, visitors now occupied the very landscape where *T. rex* fought *Triceratops*, where savage Indians stalked and picked off white prospectors, and where vigilante mobs meted out frontier justice to horse rustlers with a noose slung over a tree branch. The denizens from another time crawled over the rugged terrain of sun bleached and weather-beaten rock, strewn with dusty red hardscrabble and windswept scrubby pine and prairie grass, all under the western big sky. Sweeping below and away from the craggy primordial bluff were the storied Black Hills to the west and the South Dakota badlands to the east, untamed wilds filled with danger and treasures for those who dared to set foot therein. The *Apatosaurus*, the *Stegosaurus*, the *Trachodon*, the dueling *T. rex* and *Triceratops*, these menacing "terrible lizards" were now as synonymous with the American West as the war-bonneted plains Indian, and through the tourism industry's performative maneuvering, they were synonymous with one another too: after their encounter with the Black Hills dinosaurs, tourists could stop in to Emmet Sullivan's concession stand and procure a plaster Indian chief bust to take with them as a commemorative souvenir of their visit to Dinosaur Park before continuing their pilgrimage to

Mount Rushmore, Deadwood, and points west to reaffirm their place in the white racial hierarchy.

## Conclusion

Upon its opening in 1937, Rapid City's Dinosaur Park invited its visitors to perform a scenario of encounter with the American West's prehistoric Others. In so doing, it inaugurated, along with other emergent paleontological tourist attractions, wildly popular touristic irruptions into new global spaces previously deemed unfit for use. It offered nothing less than unprecedented access to a new consciousness that embraced the dizzying vastness of *planetary* time. Because of the cognitively inassimilable concepts that attended this new consciousness (millions of years, enigmatic creatures, mass extinction), tourism was there to fill in familiar tropes from popular frontier narratives. These tropes tapped into tried-and-true sensationalism that offered concomitantly the exhilaration of danger and the soothing frames of hierarchy, natural order, and manifest destiny. Riding on waves of scientific discovery, technological innovation, and settler colonial hunger for resources, this burgeoning planetary tourism would violently overwrite the preceding narratives of both "wasteland" and Indigenous sovereignty and the sacredness of land and waters with an emergent American mythos signified by the frontier dinosaur.

As I've argued in this essay, the concrete sculptures of Dinosaur Park in Rapid City, South Dakota, were more than simply commemorations of the state and region's paleontological heritage; more even than a serendipitous roadside attraction that capitalized on the tourist traffic to nearby Mount Rushmore. Dinosaur Park's prehistoric beasts exploited the allure of the American West that had developed over decades. The exotic giants atop this rugged frontier acropolis arrested attention for how they epitomized the spirit of westward expansion and monumentalized the West's menacing peril to the white protagonists laying claim to its treasures. Here, in performative scenarios of encounter, tourists could reenact the inaugural moment of the breach between civilization and untamed wilderness, a collapse of time and space precipitated, as in *Jurassic Park*, by science and entrepreneurship. Within the white racial frame, the park's dinosaurs served metonymically as the violent forces of nature threatening white safety and purity along with the rugged Black Hills landscape and its original Indigenous inhabitants. Emmet Sullivan was a pivotal figure in the narrative, his profile as a purveyor

of kitsch souvenirs catering to white American fantasies of the Indian Other. This, as well as his later affiliation with known racist and anti-Semitic cultural impresario Gerald L. K. Smith, lend additional significance to the network of racialized tropes connecting dinosaurs, performance, and tourism in the US. But the ones who performatively activated these tropes in Dinosaur Park were the tourists themselves, who, year after year, completed the scenario of encounter with their own visitations to the Black Hills, complicit with the fantasy of the Wild West and the catastrophe of white settler colonialism.

## Notes

1. Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), xxv–xxvi.

2. For an expanded discussion of scenarios of discovery and conquest, and ways in which allegorical tropes of savage Indians have been employed in representations in performance and visual art, see especially Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); and Rosemarie K. Bank, “Meditations upon Opening and Crossing Over: Transgressing the Boundaries of Historiography and Tracking the History of Nineteenth-Century American Theatre,” in *Of Borders and Thresholds: Theatre History, Practice, and Theory*, ed. Michal Kobialka (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). The Vespucci image, Bank writes, “is full of metaphors for entering history—Vespucci, the caravel, the sword, the banner with a southern cross, the astrolabe—concentrated, forward moving, vertical for Europe, and wandering, displaced, languid for America (the torpid sloth in the tree, other enervated animals, the reclining figure of ‘America’ taken unaware, napping in a hammock)” (Bank, 41–42).

3. Svetlana Boym, “The Dinosaur: Nostalgia and Popular Culture,” *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 33–34.

4. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Florence: Routledge, 1992), 15, 29ff.

5. Ron Tanner, “Terrible Lizard! The Dinosaur as Plaything,” *Journal of American and Comparative Cultures* 23, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 53–65.

6. Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2011); Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

7. See, for instance, Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Donna J. Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Scott Magelssen and Heidi Nees, “‘Real Live’ Indian: Sitting Bull’s Performance of Self in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West,” *Journal of Popular Entertainment Studies* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2011); Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the*

*American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Daniel Foster, "From Minstrel Shows to Radio Shows: Racism and Representation in Blackface and Blackvoice," *The Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 17, no. 2 (2005); Michael Fitzgerald, "The White Savior and his Junior Partner: The Lone Ranger and Tonto on Cold War Television (1949–1957)," *Journal of Popular Culture* 46, no. 1 (2013).

8. Joe R. Feagin, *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing*, 3rd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2020 [2013]).

9. Feagin, n.p.

10. Feagin, 6.

11. Feagin, 22.

12. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 104.

13. Theresa J. May, "Beyond Bambi: Toward a Dangerous Ecocriticism in Theatre Studies," *Theatre Topics* 17, no. 2 (2007): 96.

14. See Scott Magelssen, "Dinosaurs, Racial Anxiety, and Curatorial Intervention: Whiteness and Performative Historiography in the Museum," *Pamiętnik Teatralny* 70, no. 4 (2001).

15. Boym, 33.

16. Vittoria Di Palma, *Wasteland: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 3–4.

17. Kimbra Cutlip, "In 1868, Two Nations Made a Treaty. The U.S. Broke it, and Plains Indian Tribes are Still Seeking Justice," *Smithsonian Magazine* (7 November 2018), <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/1868-two-nations-made-treaty-us-broke-it-and-plains-indian-tribes-are-still-seeking-justice-180970741/>

18. The Battle of Little Big Horn was popularly reperformed in Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West arena shows of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

19. Helen Rezatto, *Tales of the Black Hills* (Aberdeen, SD: North Plains Press, 1983), 61ff.

20. David K. Randall, *The Monster's Bones: The Discovery of T. Rex and How it Shook Our World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2022), 33.

21. Di Palma, 19.

22. Phil Potter, "Monsters' Rise in Park: Reptiles of a Prehistoric Age Being Built for Dinosaur Monument," *New York Times*, 3 January 1937. XX10. There were still only three faces, in various stages of completion, on Mount Rushmore at the time the article was written. Theodore Roosevelt's face would be dedicated in 1939.

23. "A Short History and Guide to Dinosaur Park." Brochure. n.d.

24. Two additional, smaller sculptures of a Dimetrodon and a Protoceratops, designed by Sullivan, were added near the gift shop in later decades. Protoceratops is the only dinosaur based on fossils not found in South Dakota and the Western United States.

25. Emily M. Parris, *Dinosaur Park: Rapid City's Monument on the Hill* (Kansas City: Parris Publishing, 2020), 23.

26. "Dinosaur World or John Agar's Land of Kong." Abandoned Carousel podcast episode 28 (12 February 2020).

27. "Dinosaur Park Sculptor Emmet Sullivan," *In the Moment*, South Dakota Public Broadcasting, January 2020, <https://www.sdpb.org/rural-life-and-history/2023-04-19/dinosaur-park-sculptor-emmet-sullivan>

28. "Dinosaur Park Sculptor Emmet Sullivan."

29. Rezzatto, 160. The 1937 *New York Times* article reported that Dr. Barnum Brown from the American Museum of Natural History in New York was a consultant on the project (Potter XX10). Brown is most famous for discovering the first *T. rex* fossils.

30. "Dinosaur Park Sculptor Emmet Sullivan."

31. Charles Knight, who famously helped museum visitors imagine dinosaur fossils as once-living animals with his conjectural paintings, purportedly thought Sullivan's dinosaurs were "awful" ("Dinosaur World or John Agar's Land of Kong").

32. "Dinosaur World or John Agar's Land of Kong."

33. The Wall Drug Dinosaur is one of the most visited attractions in the American West. Sullivan would have been at least 80 years old by the time it was completed in the late 1960s (he died in 1970).

34. Smith created the famous outdoor Great Passion Play that runs in Eureka Springs to this day (see Jill Stevenson, *Sensational Devotion: Evangelical Performance in Twenty-First-Century America* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013], 98ff).

35. Sullivan and his wife obtained the concession lease upon completion of the park and opened a gift shop there that operated for several decades. The City took control of the property in 1967, after the park had fallen into disrepair. With matching funds from the state, the City renovated the park, repaired the dinosaurs and installed retaining walls and terraces, stairs and walkways with handrails, and a new gift shop (brochure).

36. Eric Grundhauser, "Tyrannosaurus Wrecks: The Most Delightfully Derpy Dinosaur Parks You'll Ever Drive Past," *Atlas Obscura*, 12 August 2015, <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/tyrannosaurus-wrecks-the-most-delightfully-derpy-dinosaur-parks-youll-ever-drive-past>

37. The park's status as a historic landmark means the city cannot alter the look of the dinosaurs, park employees told me, but the park grounds will soon undergo a major renovation including adding ADA accessible paths.

38. The most recent repainting they'd received was in 2011, when a group of volunteers from Southern Canyon Baptist Church of Rapid City gave them a fresh coat (Parris, 31).

39. Potter, XX10.

40. Elana Shever, "Becoming Stone: On the Coming-into-Being of Fossils in the American West," *Anthropological Quarterly* 93, no. 3 (2020): 472, citing David Wrobel, *Promised Lands: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 25.

41. Brian Noble, *Articulating Dinosaurs: A Political Anthropology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 4–5.

42. Noble, 19, 13.

43. W. J. T. Mitchell, *The Last Dinosaur Book: The Life and Times of a Cultural Icon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 51–52, 54.

44. Mitchell, 54.

45. Lukas Rieppel, *Assembling the Dinosaur: Fossil Hunters, Tycoons, and the Making of a Spectacle* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2019), 3.

## CHAPTER 12

# Afronauts in the Desert

### *Planetary Portals and Visitation in Afrofuturist Performance*

Weston Twardowski

A video projection on the gallery's wall showcases various locations—all deserts—that demonstrate the variety found in these hot, arid places. Sometimes the topography is flat, seeming to extend endlessly. Other locations include mountains and rock features: stones that seem to rest impossibly on each other while forming crevices that threaten to swallow visitors into the earth itself. The Bonneville Salt Flats is perhaps the most arresting site of the video exhibition: the glasslike appearance of its sand reflects two Black women as they spin in harmony with each other, wandering across the expanse, seemingly alone in a world that only exists on the horizon—somehow between earth and sky, as though floating on the surface of a painting. At nearly every space they visit the two women stand opposite each other, take out a bright white rope, grasp each end, and pull. There is a choreographic element to the exchange, a tension exists as the women allow themselves to be alternately pulled back-and-forth. This is a tensive act of play: we are aware of the physical strain the women exert as they pull against each other, but there is a childlike glee present in their tug-of-war.

The women in the videos are Lisa E. Harris and Alisha B. Wormsley, two interdisciplinary artists who have developed a series of traveling performance pieces rooted in a project started by Harris while participating in a residency at the Ballroom Marfa in Marfa, Texas. Wormsley joined Harris for a week during the residency, and the two began collaborating on what they describe as “a formulaic method of representing the expansion of the universe to reveal safe spaces for all Black beings to be in their bodies.”<sup>1</sup> In this, they invoke



Figure 12.1. Harris and Wormsley on the Salt Flats. Screenshot by the author.

an Afrofuturist performance aesthetic that blends traditional touchstones of Black culture with opera, Indigeneity, and community building. Crucially though, they also raise questions of place and visitation by highlighting their research into the sites visited for their collaborations, and by building performances that invite the audience to consider its relationship to where they are. Ballroom Marfa's residency program, where Harris and Wormsley developed much of the performance series, is certainly a space intended to further artistic excellence and provide time for artists to develop new works. But it is also unquestionably a vehicle of tourism generation. Too much of the small frontier town's economy is tied to art tourism to ignore the reality that Marfa residencies culminate in exhibitions and performances intended to further the town's surprising, but thriving, tourist trade.<sup>2</sup> The project I examine in this essay, Harris's *unlit sof landin* (first produced and performed in Marfa, but later adapted into Harris and Wormsley's *D.R.E.A.M. = A Way to AFRAM*, which was staged in Houston, Texas), not only invokes multiple ways of visiting the desert, but also invites audiences to understand their own connections to these landscapes in both materiality and theory. The artists ask those who visit their installations and participate in the accompanying performances and workshops to not only travel with them into imaginative deserts, but also to utilize the alien nature of these inhospitable—yet beautiful—places to dream of alternative worlds and ways of being.

Afrofuturist performance serves not only as a means for audiences to imaginatively visit and dream, but also to challenge tourist economies by reimagining the role of visitor. By investigating history and juxtaposing the past with other—possibly freer—futures, Harris transforms Marfa and the desert more broadly into spaces of complex, layered meanings for her audiences. In this she follows geographer Brittany Meché's assertion that "Black/African communities continue to advocate for ways to build and sustain more robust and equitable livelihoods [in] arid/semi-arid spaces."<sup>3</sup> By inviting audiences into temporary dream worlds, Harris encourages visitors to rethink how they visit and the way they see where they are visiting.

This approach of seeking permanent change through temporary collective envisioning connects to a long history of Black Utopian theorization and praxis. As political theorist Alex Zamalin argues, "a utopian kernel was . . . lodged at the beginning of the black experience. The subjugation of slaves created a transcendent culture in which spirituals embodied the prophetic faith in reaching the promised land of freedom."<sup>4</sup> Zamalin's explicit linking of song, spirituality, political theory, and cultural expression is an important lesson in the role of cultural praxis in the articulation and theorization of Black freedom. Through her performance work, Harris seeks to open portals that allow audiences to visit Afrofuturist potentialities—places of safety, imagination, healing, and utopia—to reflect on where we are, with the hope of bringing some of this imaginative possibility into our present, lived environs. These imaginative portals emerge from this longer discourse of radical, Afrofuturist utopian thinking that embraces multiculturalism, the intermingling of history with futurity, and the disjuncting of space and time to better understand where and how we live in the world. It is this component, the reevaluation of self and positionality, where Harris questions her own relationship to Marfa and encourages audiences to critically engage with their role in Marfa's tourism economy.

Visitation, and the tourism industry derived from it, presents a complex series of personal and ethical quandaries for visitors. Harris's work not only responds to the places she visits, but also centers her role as visitor. In this project she seeks to complicate her touristic relationship to Marfa and explore how visitation can offer transformative possibilities when done in ways that acknowledge how visitors and hosts both become changed by the act of visitation. As I will demonstrate in this chapter with the example of Marfa, tourism can raise the profile of a place and generate economic rewards for local communities, but these are often unequally distributed. Cities where tourism

accounts for an outsized share of the economy struggle with a surplus of low-paying jobs, while the major economic rewards are enjoyed by major corporations and executives who rarely live in the city where their hotels and chain-restaurants are located.<sup>5</sup> Improved national and international recognition of a place can cause outsiders to want to move in, even in remote communities such as Marfa. This influx of residents can help places that have experienced population decline, but it also strains local infrastructure (especially in water-scarce environments) and increases property values (which, given Texas's high property taxes, often equates to forcing people out of their homes).<sup>6</sup> Crucially, tourism can present a fundamental cultural challenge for local populations. As Bryan Schmidt notes in his chapter in this volume, local culture (religion, values, languages, etc.) may feel threatened by outsider values and ideas when new populations deliver rapid cultural change.<sup>7</sup> This tension is one that Harris explicitly questions through her work and her desire to create portals to other worlds. She utilizes Afrofuturism as a way to reimagine what the host/guest relationship looks like, and to open more safe and inclusive ways of building relationships to different places—and to the people who live, have lived, and will live in those places.

### Visiting Another World: Marfa, Texas

Best known today as a desert town with a surprising global tourism economy drawn from its internationally prominent modern art scene, Marfa sits a three-hour drive from the nearest regional airport and the same distance to the nearest major city, El Paso. Although the town's average temperature range is kinder than much of Texas (the area is fortunate to have mild winters and relatively cool summers), its semi-arid climate means that access to water is tantamount to survival in the vast, West Texas landscape. When Spanish settlers arrived in the late seventeenth century, they referred to the area as "*el despoblado*" (the uninhabited). This was inaccurate, of course: Native peoples such as the Jumanos and Lipan Apache had managed to build lives in the region for millennia, although the weather conditions meant that settlements were typically small and followed shifting climate patterns.<sup>8</sup> However, the idea of the Big Bend region as both being uninhabited and uninhabitable has helped shape its popular image into the present. The small towns that dot the region maintain a cultural image of the hardscrabble frontier town; an image complicated by the fact that Marfa's largest economic driver since the early 2000s has been art tourism.<sup>9</sup>

Marfa, like many frontier places, has a history deeply connected to racial violence.<sup>10</sup> Marfa was formally settled in 1883 as a railway water stop, however the area around Marfa had seen sporadic settlement prior to that point. Black cavalry soldiers, commonly called Buffalo Soldiers, were stationed a little over a half-day's ride from Marfa at Fort Davis, an outpost for US troops to fight local native peoples. To the South and West, archeological remains demonstrate that large Native communities had gathered in the rocky terrain. Like with many such communities, borders in the region were porous between groups. Narratives of Buffalo Soldiers using the region to form emigrational paths to Mexico for Blacks across the Southeast and Southwest exist, further emphasizing the region as a place of transition and exchange. Throughout the region's history, violent examples of conflict between the Buffalo Soldiers—whose fort existed to control and push out Native populations—and Natives contributed to the mythology of Western expansion. Examples of lynchings, most prominently that of 15 Mexican American boys and men in Porvenir (about 27 miles from Marfa), are easy to find.<sup>11</sup> Like many frontier towns, Marfa's mythos of rugged frontiersmanship is deeply enmeshed with violence and white supremacy.

Harris is deeply interested in these histories. Today, a majority of Marfa identifies as either Hispanic (28%) or multiracial (24%); however, the white population is large (44%). But Native and Black-identifying residents are rare (less than 2%), and racial tension and white supremacy are still grappled with in the region today. Perhaps the organization most prominent for exploring this history is the Blackwell School. Today, a museum, the Blackwell School was the educational facility for all Mexican American students that existed under segregation. The school was closed after segregation was outlawed and the white school in town was forced to integrate; however, the museum was founded to recognize and acknowledge the racism of the past and to serve as a community center and gathering place for locals.<sup>12</sup> Harris cites the Blackwell School as a major influence in her research and creative process.<sup>13</sup> Harris's integration of these multi-racial histories into her work is not uncommon for Afrofuturist artists, who often embrace the idea of multi-racial possibilities that imagine freedom for all oppressed peoples.<sup>14</sup> Key to Harris's process is understanding the past and present conditions of racism and precarity for minoritized communities, while offering space that opens the door to more free futures.

Marfa's frontier history is juxtaposed against its present-day reality: since the early 2000s, the town's economy has rapidly transformed to become overwhelmingly based on art tourism. The sector is now the largest employer

in the town, and the growth of tourism-related businesses is both changing the culture of Marfa as well as impacting the town's affordability. This transformation has been rapid. During the 1970s, the artist Donald Judd (who had already established himself as an important figure in the global art world based on his studio in New York) relocated to Marfa to be close to the landscape he loved and to begin a series of monumental, minimalist sculptures intended to showcase that landscape. Judd went on to found the Chinati Foundation/*La Fundación Chinati*, a Marfa arts organization dedicated to preserving Judd's work and legacy as well as continually developing new artworks by global artists that direct attention to the landscape.<sup>15</sup> As Judd brought other leading artists to Marfa during the 1980s and 1990s (until his death in 1994) the town became an important site for both residencies and contemporary artworks. Its reputation as an art space grew, and more organizations (such as Ballroom Marfa, founded in 2003) developed with similar missions to attract artists and artworks to the town, often with explicit missions to generate tourism for the small, economically declining city.<sup>16</sup>

Marfa today is thus a town in flux: for the first time in decades, the economy has begun to recover, and new businesses are returning to the area. Simultaneously, its historic frontier culture is being rapidly supplanted by a shift to serve art tourists and the artists who make the tourism possible. Newcomers and new businesses made possible by the thriving art community have made life more expensive for long-time residents, bringing the threat of displacement for those who have called Marfa home for decades or more. This tension is well demonstrated by one of the most recognizable of Marfa's permanent artworks: *Prada Marfa*. A permanent sculpture designed by Elmgreen & Dragset, *Prada Marfa* places a life-size Prada storefront along a desert highway a few miles outside of Marfa. The artwork juxtaposes one of the most recognizable fashion brands in the world (a metonym for capitalist enterprises more generally) against the expansive, sparsely populated backdrop of Marfa. The sculpture's popularity as a site for taking photos to post on social media has linked the town to global pop art, demonstrating how Marfa has become an internationally recognizable art destination, as well as a site heavily shaped by the complexities of the global art market and the capital it represents.

Marfa's economic and cultural transformation is complex. The influx of art tourists, social media influencers, and visiting artists are creating demand for new businesses. This has meant new job opportunities for Marfans for the first time in decades. Indeed, news reports note that young Marfans

can return to the area instead of seeking economic opportunity elsewhere, helping to moderate a decades-long trend in population loss.<sup>17</sup> However, the economic inequity of this new economy is stark: most jobs are low-paying tourism industry service jobs (waiters, maids, hotel staff, etc.). And housing prices have skyrocketed in recent years, driven largely by artists and tourists moving to an area they often fall in love with upon visiting.<sup>18</sup> While writing this chapter I searched for lodging options several times over the course of a year in order to track the cost of visiting and better understand who is able to travel to Marfa. What became clear is that the city's lodging options are extremely limited: a few motels that mostly cater to those passing through who want only the cheapest accommodation; several mid-priced Airbnbs that reflect larger, international concerns around short-term-rentals exacerbating housing crises; and luxury hotels (\$300+ a night at the lowest) catering to those at the highest end of the economic spectrum.

When I spoke to Harris about her time in Marfa, she was acutely aware of these tensions and sought to highlight the colonizing potential of art. The investment represented by the high-priced commercial art world (and the ensuing high-priced hotels, restaurants, and familiar trappings of tourism economies that have begun to form in response to global travelers' treks to Marfa) represent one form of colonization. More broadly though, the concept of Marfa as an "artist colony," which is made tangible via the galleries funding artists for residential stays, prompts questions about the role of artists themselves in enabling this colonization—this is a role Harris explicitly states she is uneasy with and wants to interrogate.<sup>19</sup> Harris's self-reflexive recognition of her own position as a visitor (one who admittedly fell in love with the natural beauty of the desert landscape) encouraged her to research the place and people she was visiting. In her work she seeks to recognize her position as an outsider while considering how to contribute to the community, rather than recolonize it. This recognition of her role as a visitor, and her goals of connecting to a place and creating safety for communities who have been historically harmed by colonialism, became a driving part of the multi-sited performance piece she created through her Marfa residency.

### *Dream Machine*

Harris and Wormsley's multi-sited performance series is entitled *D.R.E.A.M.* = *A Way to AFRAM (Diffraction + Restoration + Electromagnetic Analogue*



Figure 12.2. Harris and Wormsley pull a rope to open a “portal” in front of Prada Marfa. Screenshot by the author.

*of Mass = A Way to AFRAM*). They describe AFRAM (Marfa backwards) as “an inner space reality for Black exponential potential of Being.”<sup>20</sup> While this work was derived from the Marfa residency, it is now on tour throughout the country, and different locations experience different expressions of the ongoing project. The tour consists of exhibitions, performances, and workshops that the pair use to “open portals to AFRAM.”<sup>21</sup> The Marfa exhibition, curated by Harris, is entitled *unlit: sof landin*, and ran from May 24–September 16 of 2023. Harris trained as a classical musician, predominantly a vocalist, whose work utilizes sound improvisation that often blends opera, jazz, spoken word, and instruments. Her work incorporates the theremin, an electronic musical instrument common in science fiction film scores and sound effects (most famous for the fact it is operated without physical contact as the performer stands beside it moving her hands, which is detected by capacitors on the instrument). The core of the traveling performances was a series of filmed “portal openings” wherein the two utilized improvised and experimental sound, the invocation and repetition of text (typically pulled from historical records of Black life in the places they visit, or from texts of significant cultural value to African Americans such as the Bible). *Dream Machine*, the exhibition’s film component, explores multiple locations and histories, but the work’s core remains connected to Marfa. Marfa’s desert

location undoubtedly informed subsequent site selections: all of the portals in the video project are connected to desert landscapes. Marfa is also by far the most prominent location featured in the film, occurring repeatedly and quickly identifiable given the signage and artworks the artists use as backdrops for their experiments. But the main concepts of the work are equally tied to the questions that emerged from the Marfa residency: what does it mean to be a Black visitor in an environment that is inhospitable to Black life? How do artists create safe spaces for Black visitors across time and location?

Harris and Wormsley talk openly about their discomfort as Black women artists in residence in a remote, tiny frontier town with a miniscule Black population. Marfa's population per US census data is 1,788—of that, a total of only 13 residents are Black. In workshops for the performance series they recount a story of arriving in Marfa to meet another Black artist in residence who ran up to the pair to say, “thank God you're here!”<sup>22</sup> In their arrival in Marfa, Harris and Wormsley become a version of terrestrial “Afronauts,” a portmanteau for “Black Astronaut” popularized by Afrofuturist literature to indicate explorers who “[go] about finding safe spaces for Black life.”<sup>23</sup> Critic Elizabeth C. Hamilton argues that Afronauts are figures who seek and create safe spaces for Black people through “exploring and protecting and preparing the body for hostile environments.”<sup>24</sup> In this sense, Marfa is threatening not only through its remote location and climate reality as a desert town, but also through the cultural politics of its frontier culture, which was historically rooted in white supremacy (as Joanna Dee Das explores well in her contribution to this volume).

The invocation of the Afronaut figure is further represented in the two performers' costuming. While their outfits change with the various landscapes they visit across the films, they often don reflective plastic masks that obscure their faces. These masks echo an astronaut's helmet, invoking the imagery of the face shield needed to visit the moon (in reality) or other planets (in science fiction). The masks appear to be a later addition to the project: the costume element appears in all the filmed segments in Utah; however, they are absent from the pieces in Marfa. The result locates Marfa as the “homeworld” for the performers: in Marfa they do not require masks as they do when visiting other locations.

Complicating time and place is central to Harris and Wormsley's exploration. By filming their performances across different desert spaces, the viewer is left unsure of the order of their travels, and uncertain of their location. This has the effect of alienating audiences from their surroundings. The

effect is what theater scholar Soyica Diggs Colbert describes as “temporal multiplicity—that is, time working in counterpoint rather than linearly,” which presents multiple readings of Blackness and Black possibility to the audience.<sup>25</sup> With *Afronauts in the desert*, we are encouraged to understand the hostilities of these spaces and the feelings of discomfort and isolation that the Black performers experience when visiting.

Further complicating the landscapes are the invocations of history that the performers utilize in voice-overs throughout the footage. Across the materials presented to audiences, the artists describe the process of opening portals as the physical tension of playing and performing at sites, but also the work of excavating histories from the places they visit. In the film, images of Black community members at churches from the early part of the twentieth century immediately create a sense of historical connection for audiences. As theorist Sofia Samatar argues, Afrofuturism prizes “time-traveling leaps . . . and the reanimation of history.”<sup>26</sup> This effort to rediscover forgotten Black histories in places like Marfa is a key part of the work of Afrofuturist performance.

The texts brought into the performances (both the live performances and the film) feel almost like riddles. For instance, the film opens with a repeated, recorded voiceover that has the unmistakable vocal timbre of an older woman speaking in the repetitive, emphatic style common of preachers in African American churches—perhaps the voice belongs to Harris or Wormsley’s own mother or grandmother? The voice repeats a phrase over and over: “many there are that started the race, but with the light they refuse to keep pace. Others accept it, because it is news, but not very many is expected to go through.”<sup>27</sup> As the phrase gets repeated, the speaker makes small errors in the repetition, catching herself and starting over. When she gets the phrase correct, another, older, voice responds to the speaker with affirmations (“that’s right, that’s right”). The program materials for the performances (which present a range of scientific data, drawings, and reflections on the material that Harris and Wormsley have chosen to share) includes six Biblical passages, reinforcing the connections to religion and history.

The utilization and shaping of sound are arguably the performance’s defining traits. During the Marfa residency, Harris began composing a series of performances. These ultimately came together as a nine-hour musical piece intended to invite a meditative, reflective sonic space to help audiences discover or envision their own safe spaces. The musical piece sought to bring the idea of portal creation directly to audiences: by visiting the music/setting

audiences were encouraged and provided space to imaginatively create their own worlds. Parts of this score plays over the footage they recorded in the desert. The opening track is called “Marfa Dream Pallete 1,” and it features a dissonant theme with overlapping electronic instruments, which gives way to broad, open chimes. The film includes elements of the score, but also myriad other sonic components, such as the aforementioned Biblical texts, short songs, and rhythmic expressions performed by Harris. These often have the quality of freewriting experiments. Harris refers to them as “recollections of dreams deconstructed and rewoven into an animate aural dreamscape.”<sup>28</sup> For instance, in one voiceover, she begins narrating a story before diverging into a repetitive, patter-like improvised song:

So . . . y’all the things about, the thing, the thing about—the thing about cracks. Okay, not crack. But maybe crack, I don’t know, but the thing about cracks. The sidewalk. And the sky.

The crack on your iPhone, I know y’all feel some kind of way about those cracks.

The thing about cracks, is that every crack is an opportunity to slip through. So when you see a crack—any crack that you see. I want you to remember, these things that I’m saying to you right now. I want you to remember. That on one breath you can slip through. That on one breath you can remember.

When I was little they used to say, step on a crack you break your mother’s back, step on a crack, you break your mother’s back, step on a crack, you break your mother’s back—it’s not true.

Go forth. Be blessed.<sup>29</sup>

These spoken interludes provide directions for the listener. Harris’s invocation of a “crack” parallels theorist Fred Moten’s conception of “the break” as a space of Black radical freedom, resistance, and sonic imagination.<sup>30</sup> As Moten writes of the break, “this location, at once internal and interstitial . . . [is a] refusal of closure.” These fissures invite the audience to consider how cracks might be entryways, points from which to imagine separate futures and, indeed, potential openings to other worlds and alternative ways of being. They encourage audiences to imaginatively visit freer worlds and then remain connected to the in-between—to try and unite lived reality with utopic pos-

sibility. In effect, the visitation (the peering/stepping into the crack) provides the audience with a transformational possibility both for the self and the material world around the visitor.

The vocal passages also make explicit the need for safe spaces for Black individuals, as well as the need for imaginative worlds and existences that provide peace and joy to Black people. At one point, a sonic sequence begins with overlapping soundbites: the voices include Harris (speaking in the style of a flight attendant), and unknown male voice who repeats one violent phrase, and the voice of Geneva Reed-Veal—the mother of Sandra Bland, whose high-profile death while in the custody of Texas police was in recent memory during the piece’s composition. The overlapping clips create an eerie effect. The dialogue is as follows:

Geneva Reed-Veal	Male Voice Repeats Phrase	Harris
Alexis Montgomery. Sarah Lee Circle Bear.	I used to beat her all the time and she was the queen.	Please hurry and take your seats.
Raynette Turner. Ralkina Jones.	I used to beat her all the time and she was the queen.	You can step out of the aisle so the other passengers can come through. As quickly as possible.
Andres Darnell. So many—of our children are gone. But they are not forgotten.	I used to beat her all the time and she was the queen.	We will be blasting off soon. Passenger Reikia Boyd.
Alexis Montgomery. Sarah Lee Circle Bear.	I used to beat her all the time and she was the queen.	Alexis Montgomery. Raynette Turner.
Raynette Turner. Ralkina Jones.	I used to beat her all the time and she was the queen.	Ralkina Jones. Passenger Sandra Bland.
Andres Darnell. So many of our children are gone. But they are not forgotten.	I used to beat her all the time and she was the queen.	This is your last call. Please report to the gate.
Alexis Montgomery. Sarah Lee Circle Bear.	I used to beat her all the time and she was the queen.	
Raynette Turner. Ralkina Jones.	I used to beat her all the time and she was the queen.	
Andres Darnell. So many of our children are gone. But they are not forgotten.	I used to beat her all the time and she was the queen.	
Alexis Montgomery. Sarah Lee Circle Bear.	I used to beat her all the time and she was the queen.	
Raynette Turner. Ralkina Jones.	I used to beat her all the time and she was the queen.	

When Harris begins speaking, her voice slow and calm over the others, her invocation to board immediately grounds the audience in an awareness of the potential to travel. The names of Black individuals killed while in police custody (including the addition of Sandra Bland, arguably the most recognizable of the individuals listed) works to open potential: is this vessel taking us to a safe place for Black people, or to a place of peace for Black individuals who have perished (too often by violent means)? Or, perhaps, are these places one in the same, since we the audience are called upon to find and create these welcome spaces against the hostile world?

### *unlit: sof landin*

The first of the traveling exhibits in *D.R.E.A.M.*, *unlit: SofLandin* was an exhibition solely credited to Harris that took place at the Marfa Ballroom from 24 May to 16 September 2023, which was the culmination of her Ballroom residency. The piece openly plays with the reality of Marfa's existence largely as a site for art tourists. The largest component and core of the exhibit is a massive parachute-like tent within the exhibition space, which consumes the room and clearly invokes the feeling of a camping tent (albeit one roughly ten times larger than any backpacker's tent). The soft, warm colors that light the space mimic a desert night with a nearby campfire. This immersive set allows audiences to connect to the experience of a desert visit, but the controlled room in which it stands (and, especially, the impossible, sustained beauty of the colors this allows) make the visit feel different from the desert as we know it. It is a play on the desert, the desert as reflected and refracted through the creation of a portal.

The portal space is distinct from a typical campsite in several ways, the most obvious being the scale of the tent: consuming the gallery room, the parachute above allows space for around thirty people to stand comfortably. In the middle of the room, under the center of the parachute, is a large rug with specially-designed bedding for audiences to lay on and absorb the soundscape. This bedding can easily accommodate six visitors. At the parachute's center hangs an enormous six-piece windchime—each roughly five feet long. The chime corresponds to the sonic environment of the space as Harris's nine-hour composition plays in the room. The music, similar to but more expansive than that featured in the film, follows the same primary components of electronic instruments, field recordings (largely of oral histories),

and numerous voiceovers from Harris as she meditates on and recollects her dreams. These dream journal readings, which typically begin with some statement like “I had a dream” or “I dreamt last night” immediately encourage the audience to contemplate their own dreams. The relaxed space of the tent, especially the bedding on the floor, creates a strong desire to lie down, to meditate and listen as the audience slips in and out between the space of the room and their own dreams. The doubled nature of “dream” also invites multiple reflections. Certainly, audiences might reflect on their nightly dreams as they sleep, but one can just as easily be drawn into imagining hopes and dreams for the future.

Across the exhibition, Harris uses scale as a tool of defamiliarization for her audiences. The tent room evokes both a childhood joy of playing with a parachute, while also clearly expanding on any familiar experiences of tent camping the audience might have. The nine-hour composition almost certainly ensures the music will not be heard in its entirety and challenges listeners to fall in and out of listening much as one might fall in and out of a meditative practice. Lastly, while the Ballroom exhibit mimics and refracts the desert experience, the fact remains that upon leaving the gallery audiences return to the actual desert town of Marfa. The juxtaposition works to recenter a visitor’s experience of the desert and understand anew our relationship to the world around us. The challenge to our familiar understanding of a desert here follows what philosopher Frédéric Neyrat argues is a core tenet of Afrofuturist art: a decentering of the Anthropocene and a call to reconnect to the cosmos that surrounds us—or an attention to what Neyrat terms the alienocene. The connection to cosmos, Neyrat suggests, is a move to view outer space (and, by extension, terrestrial sites of connection to outer space) as a place for “meditation, a stellar detour thanks to which our terrestrial condition can be rethought.”<sup>31</sup> Marfa’s popularity based on its remote desert beauty—something that can almost seem extraterrestrial to those unaccustomed to the terrain—is a clear part of what has drawn artists, and the ensuing art tourism, to the town.

While the tent room is by far the largest element to *unlit: soflandin*, there are other components to the exhibit: upon entering the gallery, a large, shiny, black rock rests on a rich purple display case. It is reminiscent of natural obsidian, although it is clearly made by the artist. Music and sounds emanate from the rock, welcoming the audience into the space and preparing them for the meditative, modernist music of Harris’s dreamworld to follow. The rock invites multiple readings: the geologic item prods us to imagine

natural history museums and their vast collections of minerals, but the unfamiliar nature of the stone's appearance (both its shine and the multiple textures that run across the stone) invite a possible connection to space through moon rocks and other extraterrestrial stones. The tension between earth and space thus greets audiences from the onset. The second major element to the exhibit is the sound creation room. The smaller of the gallery spaces dedicated to Harris's work, this second room projects Harris and Wormsley's video collaboration on a wall on repeat. In the room's center are two instruments: a theremin and the windchimes. Audiences can easily move around the instruments, but the ease with which they can be operated encourages participants to make their own music as they explore the space.

Visiting the music and tent rooms provide audiences with an invitation to reflect, imagine, and create. Harris's goal is "to soften and activate the power of dreams and the unconscious as a means for transcendence, survival, preservation, and joy."<sup>32</sup> This desire to create space where audiences might imagine (visit) other worlds, even momentarily, is a move to encourage new practices of care, but also a call to reimagine our existence on this physical planet. In defamiliarizing the audience's connection to the desert, in asking those tourists visiting the exhibit to become explorers, Harris provides audiences a way to reexamine themselves. This journey to a portal may provide visitors with the ability to imagine other, freer worlds certainly. But in returning from these extraterrestrial sites of the mind, audiences return to the earth anew. We are reminded of the real violence done to Black people globally, and we must question why these spaces of safety and peace are so unimaginable in our quotidian lives. Likewise, our connection to the earth is renewed through the distance experienced by imaginatively leaving the planet. Just as *Earthrise* (the legendary photograph of the Earth taken from the Moon) inspired viewers to imagine themselves as astronauts beholding the planet, in all its fragility in space, visiting a portal might enable audiences to reconnect to the planet through a renewed desire to understand the earth around them.

## Revisitation and New Places to Visit

Part of Harris's ongoing process of reimagining tourism is turning to pilgrimage. As with many pieces, Harris and Wormsley are traveling with *D.R.E.A.M.* Their first performance rooted in the work at Marfa occurred in Houston, which I attended in 2023. The piece echoed many of the same

ideas of Marfa—the film played on the four walls of the performance space, an enormous windchime dominated the central stage, and instrumentalists sat on opposite sides of the performance space. Harris and Wormsley opened the piece with a tug-of-war, and the film from Marfa formed the performance's backbone. The performance itself (a mix of improvisation, vocalization, music, and monologues) was Harris continuing her process from Marfa, expanding on the ideas in a new context, hoping to create new portals, new opportunities for imaginative possibility and reflection.

As the piece travels, Harris is intentionally inviting questions around how we visit: how can *D.R.E.A.M.* both take us to Marfa and to the desert, but also help ground us where we are? Harris has built relationships with local community members of Marfa. Since *unlit: sof landin* she has taken two small groups of artists to Marfa to host parties with music and dancing at popular local businesses. These parties remix ideas of pilgrimage (visitation and return, collective attendance, connection to holy space) with questions of how to bring back and share the transformational experience. If one becomes transformed through a “pilgrimage” (a visit to Marfa) what does the visitor owe to their community (Houstonians in Harris's case) upon their return? What do they owe the place of transformation (Marfa)? Likewise, what does it mean for an artist to continually revisit a place to build stronger ties and try to create an exchange—not to *colonize* but to *collaborate* with a place and its inhabitants? Harris works to both help artists learn about Marfa's history and the town's present, ongoing artistic work, while simultaneously developing programming that is meant to be experienced and enjoyed by the local population. This act moves closer to a model that Mary Louise Pratt suggests of visitation as “host-guest relations, which belong to the gift economy and are valued for being noncommercial,”<sup>33</sup> by rejecting a form of tourism where one goes to a place solely to consume, and instead demanding a connection to those living in the place of visitation.

This connection to place and people across history, the present, and the future reveals the radical potential of Afrofuturist performance as a space for both creating imagined, better worlds, and for challenging the structures of our material present. In visiting sites of possibility we are encouraged to reimagine our reality. Further, it demands the audience reckon with the systems through which they have arrived at a place: economies of travel, tourism, and art, all of which have impacts not only on the local, visited populations, but on the planet itself. As Harris travels with these performances to new places, I wonder what new dreams will be developed? What can an Afronaut's visit impart on a new site, and how might these visits encourage

audiences to dream new worlds as well as discover (through the presence of a visitor) more about their own environs? I am reminded of how Harris and Wormsley open a portal: pulling a rope against each other in an act of play filled with tension. Is it too much to hope that we invite more tension into our tourist play? If we were to embrace the complexity of tourism—historical legacies as well as present economic, ecological, and cultural entanglements—perhaps we could become more ethical tourists. Reflecting on these performances allows me to believe this is possible; in fact, it makes me dream for it.

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